Everybody's

NUMBER FOUR APRIL, 1925 VOLUME FIFTY-TWO

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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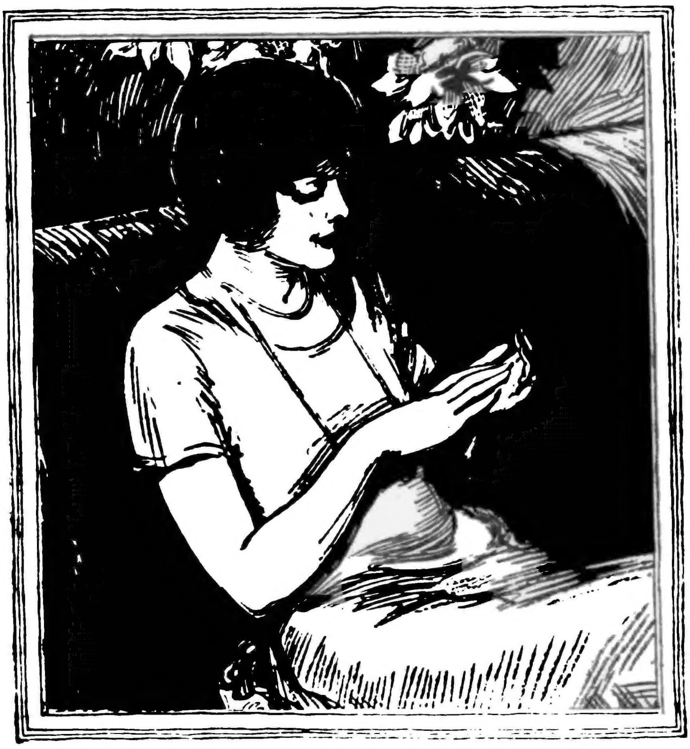
To prevent
"laundry and dishpan hands"

Women who do their own work
find this method keeps the
skin soft and white



How often have you asked yourself this question?

"Oh, isn't there some way I can do my washing and dishes and yet keep my hands looking nice?"

Millions of other women have answered "yes." Let them tell you how they do it.

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Mrs. A. J. L., *Toronto*

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silk lingerie *
silk nightgowns *
silk blouses *
silk negligees
handkerchiefs
sports skirts
cuffs and collars
sweaters ties
scarves dresses

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Advertising section continued in rear of book

Everybody's

VOL. 52, NO. 4 APRIL, 1925 SEWELL HAGGARD, EDITOR

The
Critic on the Hearth

Showing That You Can't Sometimes Always Tell How Your Wife Will React to Advice on How to Run the Household

By Ernest Poole

Illustration by Louis G. Schroeder

AS IN the keen frosty air he walked briskly home from the office that night, Edgar was thinking of his wife; and his round, pleasant, resolute face took on a gleam of anticipation. They had been married only five years, and he still felt sure it would be a success. He was very deeply in love with Gay; and if he criticized her at times, no one knew better than himself that he did it only for her good. Eight years ago, at college, Edgar's young idea of love had been a living, thrilling force that would make two people grow. He had pictured himself with a pretty young wife, reading good novels together aloud, and going to plays, to concerts, lectures, dinners, dances. None of this dull and narrow domestic rut you heard about—no, they would get out and see things, hear things, meet new people all the time; and then come home and talk them over, in long, deliciously intimate talks. But all this growth demanded two things, freedom from worries and money to spend; and it was there the trouble came—for sweet and winsome though she was, Gay was a poor manager. Again and again, when things got in a snarl, he cursed the training she had had; and repeatedly, with all the patience which only a husband can display, Edgar resolutely attacked the disorderly conduct of Gay's mind. It was hopeless. You could talk of the value of household budgets until you were blue in the face; control your impatience, start again, and nicely, kindly, reasonably explain the simple little double-entry system that you were urging her to try. Hopeless still. She could not understand.

"But Edgar, darling," she would wail, "what earthly difference can it make to *know* where every penny goes? I never spend a *cent* till I have to!"

And though, to please him, she did try his simple little plan for a while, under her hands it soon grew to be such a fearful labyrinth of figures and notes that even Edgar gave it up. Gay simply wasn't systematic. She couldn't balance her bank account, was forever getting overdrawn. She was never quite sure how much she owed in back wages to the servants. She didn't even know how to buy food; she simply went to market and bought, in the good old antiquated way. She never thought of forming a coöperative group of her friends to buy food wholesale at club rates; and when Edgar explained and expounded this sensible masculine device, with that silvery little laugh of hers Gay retorted:

"Oh, Edgar, dear! And all have beefsteak the same night?"

And even when he answered that each woman in the group could of course choose any meat she liked, Gay made the astonishing reply that it would drive her simply frantic to feel that all her friends and neighbors knew what she was having for dinner each night! In short, her whole manner of thinking was as hopelessly out of date as the little old house in which they lived, which Gay had insisted on taking, instead of the clean, new, snappy apartment which would have been her husband's choice.

THROUGH all this medieval disorder leaked the money Edgar earned. He earned it by hard, clean work at his office, and it was tough to come home at night and see it running through the sieve of his pretty young wife's haphazard ways. Ever since the baby was born, they had been almost constantly hard up; and the worst of it was, he told himself, that they didn't even get good value for the money that they spent. Gay didn't know how to handle a servant; she was always changing cooks; and she had a genius, Edgar found, for choosing women who cooked such meals that it was all a man could do to digest his supper at night—let alone live up to any high ideals of growth through love.

Patiently still he tried his best to stick to those early dreams of his; but there was little money now for concerts, plays or lectures—they had to go to the movies instead; and when they were asked to some dinner or dance, Gay would often as not refuse, on the ground that she didn't have decent clothes. Well, the poor girl was right about that, and he made up his mind to see what he could do. In his thorough, efficient, painstaking way, through a friend in a department store, he went into the whole bewildering economy of woman's dress. He brought Gay charts and magazines that covered the subject from *A* to *Z*, and even a little plan of his own for making a little money buy an immense amount of charm. But not only did Gay refuse his plan; she even flared up and told him to keep out of her affairs!

"All right, honey girl, you know what you want," her husband patiently replied; and he tried to make the best of it.

If they couldn't go out so much at night, at least they could be happy at home. So he brought home some novels to read, and often they had such evenings as he had dreamed of long ago. But at other times, when the baby was ill or Gay had just fired another nurse, she was absent-minded and depressed—in short, a wretched listener. And it was all that he could do to keep his patience with her then. Why in God's name *should* a baby have croup or measles, mumps or chickenpox, in this modern hygienic age? Oh, the evenings that were spoiled by that perfectly needless crying upstairs! In vain he argued with his wife. Gay knew nothing of child hygiene, nor was she even willing to learn from the knowledge Edgar had acquired. In vain he went thoroughly into the subject. Again he was shooed off Gay's preserves—and the poor little baby had to yelp and yowl its way through infancy without the efficiency waiting downstairs in a yearning father's mind.

But all these troubles were only the clouds that overhung their married life. Gay was an adorable little thing, and so was the baby; and this queer old house of theirs was mighty attractive, in a way. Gay was artistic—no doubt about that—and cheerful and sweet as she could be; and between those little tiffs they had, were other times quite filled with joys too intimate for mention here—nights when he felt so safe in their love, so sure their marriage was a success and could be made even more so with tact, that patiently again and again Edgar returned to the attack. He was learning the technique of it now; he was not so ambitious, he sneaked it in. He balanced her bank book for her each month, and so managed to learn where the money went; and then made practical little suggestions, some of which she even adopted. It was the same in the nursery and even in the kitchen. Nothing radical or strong, but just tactful little hints, made as often as not with a smile. He was learning *how* to criticize.

But then Gay's young sister Elsie, having finished her college course, had come to New York a year ago; and a more cocksure and bumptious kid Edgar Brant had never seen. More than once he cursed the kind heart which had made him agree that she live with them—for not only did young Elsie bring such disorder into the home as made Gay appear like an orderly mouse, but she brought in a wrong spirit, too. Criticize? She would bite your head off for one word! She was all angles, Elsie was, from her bobbed black hair and big wide mouth to her sharp little shoulders. In short, she was a thorn in Edgar's side—and he now thanked God for Tom Kinkade.

TOM had appeared about three months back, and to Edgar's surprise had seemed at once to be infatuated with the girl. The thing was almost incredible—and yet what other reason could possibly bring Tom to the house? Gay was nice to him, of course, but Gay was twenty-six and a wife, and such an obvious wife, at that. No, it was Elsie—by some weird trick she had certainly got this attractive young lad exactly where she wanted him. They would make a match of it soon, and Edgar fervently thanked his luck. Even the endless scenes the girl made, and the long and idiotic talks which she insisted on having with Gay, while she was trying to make up her mind, had left him unruffled.

"Let her alone. She'll take him all right—and then I can call my house my own," thought Edgar, as he walked home one night. His round face brightened at the thought of the domestic peace ahead. And he had, besides, something else in his mind. He had hit on a good idea that day, and he could barely wait to see what his wife would think of it.

On reaching the house, he found Gay and Elsie plainly excited, all keyed up; but Edgar had grown used to that, and so, before Elsie could snub him aside, he produced his little surprise for Gay. One of the greatest mail-order houses in the entire Middle West, which did business mainly with farms and small towns, and supplied you with everything under the sun, from plows to wedding-rings and corsets, kitchen stoves and plumbers' tools, had now gone in for Paris gowns, and had issued a special catalogue depicting the most gorgeous creatures most alluringly arrayed. And the prices! Edgar lost no time in showing his wife the gown he had chosen. Thirty-two dollars and fifty cents!

"It's one of the smartest models in Paris! Look at it!" he proudly cried. "All you do is to send your measurements, as per specifications here, and their efficiency dress engineers have got it all figured down so fine that they can fit any woman on earth! They've worked it out as accurate as a geometrical design—taken every possible female shape and reduced 'em to twelve—and with each one of those as a basis, they take the specifications you send—and alter a bit—and there you are!"

"Exactly!" Gay retorted, for some absurd reason much amused. "Mathematically dressed—like a thousand other women and girls. You meet your new gown wherever you go."

Her disappointed husband shot a little look of chagrin. "Well, what's the matter with that?" he asked.

"Everything's the matter with that—it's simply impossible," said his wife, while Elsie gave an impatient snort.

"Look here," demanded Edgar, holding up his catalogue. "You mean to say you'd give up the chance of looking like that, just because others have it, too?"

"I most certainly do."

"Well, I'm damned!"

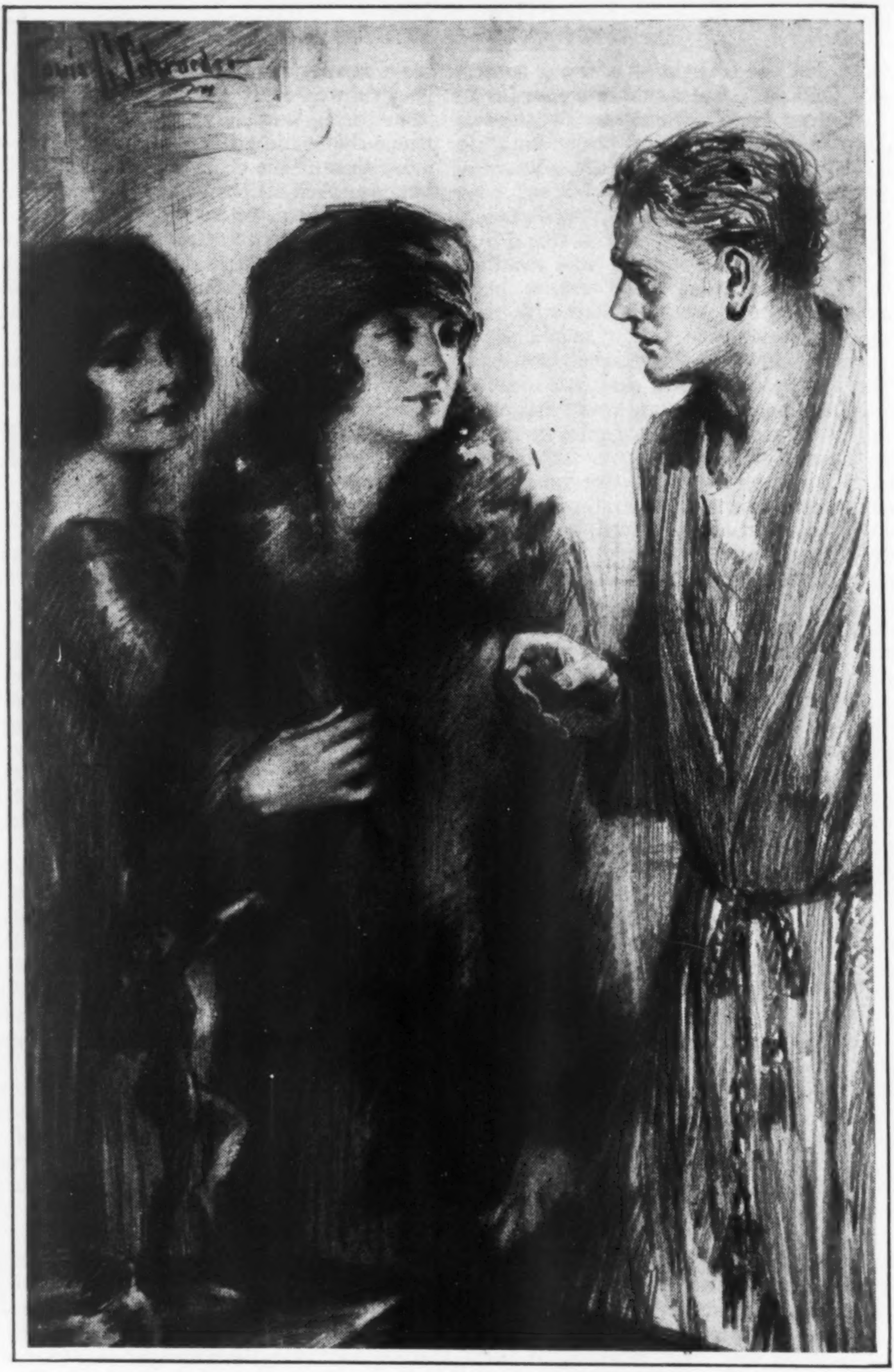
"Now, Edgar, Edgar, drop it, dear. I don't want to think of gowns tonight—"

"But I want you to think of 'em!" he cried. He had had a hard day, and it made him sore to come home and be smilingly snubbed like this. "Here I do my darnedest to get things nice and snappy here, and all I get for it is a laugh! If you knew the trick of dressing well on what little we can spend—as any number of women do, right in our own office, too—it would be different! But you don't! You've lost all interest in clothes! I want you to think of 'em—it's about time! You're one of the prettiest girls I know—and it makes me sore to see you letting yourself all run to seed! Here—take a look at this again—for thirty-two dollars and fifty cents! And then take a look at yourself!" he cried. And he pointed to the mirror.

"Oh-h!" With a stamp of her foot and one furious glare, Gay burst into tears and ran out of the room.

Edgar looked after her in amazement. "Well!" he exclaimed.

"WELL!" echoed a tense voice at his side, and he turned to face the snapping black eyes and quivering lips of Elsie. "Well, Mr. Critic on the Hearth, you've about spoiled everything tonight—for every single one of us! I'm going to give you a piece of my mind!"



Edgar walked abruptly in upon Gay and her sister. "There's been about enough of this," he snapped. "Where have you been, Gay?"

"Don't," said Edgar tartly. He didn't want a piece of her mind; he liked neither her thoughts nor her emotions. But Elsie proceeded to give him both.

"If I were Gay, I'd get out of this house so quick it would surprise you!" she cried. "You criticize from morning to night—the meals, the bills, the laundry! The clothes she wears—the very way she does her hair and takes care of her child!"

On she went into a long list of Edgar's efforts to help his wife. But he was not listening now. He was feeling damnably disturbed over this little flare-up of Gay's. Once more he had put his foot in it, and he knew that before she forgave him, he would have to go on his knees. Besides, he hated to see her cry; it made him feel like a perfect brute. Yes, but damn it all, he was right! And impatiently breaking into Elsie's idiotic talk, he snapped:

"Oh, Elsie, cut it out! What do you know of married life? When you love a girl as I love Gay, you've got to hurt her sometimes—"

"Does Gay hurt you?" she retorted, and without waiting for a reply: "It would serve you jolly well right if she did!"

"Thank you!" Edgar answered.

"You loved her before you married her, didn't you? Did you feel you had to hurt her then? Did you criticize everything she did?"

"There wasn't a thing to criticize!" Edgar said decidedly.

The grim smile of a younger sister suddenly flashed on Elsie's face. "Oh, wasn't there?" she answered.

But Edgar refused to get angry now. "Well, if there was, I didn't see it. Love is blind," was his reply.

"Oh, that's all piffle, pooh-bah, bunk!" the Younger Generation cried. "You weren't blind; you were worried, that's all. She had two or three others after her then, so you had to be right up on your toes!"

"All right, all right," he agreed again, "but she was only twenty-one. She's nearly twenty-seven now, and a husband has a right to expect—"

"You speak as though she were seventy!"

"I say a man has a right to expect that his wife will keep up, and not let herself down! Look at the way she dressed at that time—then look at her now!" said Edgar.

"She's just as attractive now to men as she ever was—and a whole lot more!"

"How do you know she is?" Edgar asked. "I don't see many hovering round."

"Don't you?"

"No. Do you?" he rejoined.

As she glanced angrily back at his face, Elsie's whole expression changed. Suddenly she turned away, grew rigid, seemed to gather herself; and when she turned slowly back to him, her look was so darkly ominous that even Edgar gave a start.

"DO YOU think I'd be talking to you like this, if it weren't for Tom Kinkade?" she asked.

He looked at her in blank amazement. "What the devil do you mean?"

"Hasn't Tom been hovering round?"

"On your account!" was the reply.

Elsie's answer came with tears: "He was—at the beginning—"

"And he is still, you darned young—"

"Is he? Watch him—when he comes tonight!"

Edgar stared at her dumfounded. It was easy enough for him to see how a man could be drawn from Elsie to Gay, if Gay so much as lifted a hand. But would she? Inconceivable! She had simply set her mind on this match!

"Piffle!" he said to Elsie now. "Why, you're practically engaged already!"

"I am not engaged already!" Her voice again was close to tears.

"Then what in thunder did you mean by that scene you were having with Gay last night?"

With a little start, and then a sob, she retorted wildly, "Does a girl give up the man she loves without fighting for him?"

Edgar drew back. "You mean you were talking of *that* to Gay?"

"I certainly do!"

"I don't believe it!"

"Watch her—when Tom comes tonight!"

"Elsie," said Edgar, after a pause, "you've got a pretty rotten mind. You're either lying or else you're using a morbid imagination," he added; "and I don't know which is worse. God help Kinkade when he marries you."

With that, Edgar went up to his wife. By contrast to young Elsie and her morbid jealous mind, or possibly because of some obscure emotion she had stirred, Gay seemed so sweet and desirable now that he was quite ready to beg her forgiveness, and let his new plan for a Paris gown go the way of all the rest of his patient efforts to help his wife. But when he came into their room and saw her at her dressing table, she cut him off before he could speak.

"Don't talk to me!" she exclaimed, in a tone which gave him a little chill of alarm.

"All right—all right—if you will be sore—"

GOING into the nursery, Edgar gloomily greeted his child. But after a very few moments of trying to appear jocose, while his small son pulled his hair, he went back to his wife and said:

"Now look here, Gay—"

"Don't talk to me! You've gone a little too far, Edgar Brant; this time you've said just a little too much! Right in front of Elsie, too! The next time you want to call me a frump, you will kindly do it when we're alone!"

"But I never meant to call you—"

"Oh, be quiet!" was her reply. "You'd better go and take your bath!"

"All right, I will!"

Indignantly Edgar threw off his clothes, went into the bathroom and shut the door. And as he angrily undressed, he told himself a lot of things about wives and sisters and married life. But when later he stood in the bathtub and felt the warm, voluptuous sting of his beloved needle spray, he began to feel himself again. For this regular shower, morning and night, was one of the brightest silver linings to the clouds of his home life.

Gay had been very nice about that shower. When he first proposed it, a year ago, although obstinately blind to the benefit and joy she might have in making use of it herself, she had given it to him at Christmas, as a delightful little surprise. How he had enjoyed it ever since! First the hot water, steaming-hot; and then, when he felt all warmed through, relaxed and soft as a young child—a slow brave turn of the faucet, and the water began to grow cool—and cooler—cold—then icy! But stinging—sharp with tiny pricks! Glorious! And up to date! Out of the tub he stepped, a new man—ready again for living! . . . And so it was with him tonight. With a vigorous rubbing his warm tingling limbs and chest, Edgar's smile came back again. Gay flirting with another man? Vamping her sister's fiancé? The idea was so ridiculous that, when he had dressed and gone downstairs, he greeted Tom Kinkade as warmly as he ever had. Thank God for another man tonight!

All through supper he determinedly kept up his air of the genial host; and even when to his surprise he did catch significant little smiles and glances that Gay shot at Tom, still he refused to be alarmed. He was strengthened in this resolve by young Elsie's actions. Every time he looked her way, he found her eyes fixed on his face; again and again by a glance or a nod she appeared to be asking, "Are you still blind?" But Edgar only blandly smiled. He grew interested in Elsie now, in the petty jealousy of the girl. Here was poor Gay being merely friendly, in the most innocent way, with Tom—"friendly, merely friendly!" Edgar kept saying to himself. And yet Elsie was quite plainly working herself into a rage; she all but bit the napkin, every time he looked her way. "My God, it's amazing!" Edgar thought.

THEY were back in the living-room now, and Gay had Tom over close to the lamp, showing him in the family album pictures of Elsie and herself, from the days when they were kids. "Well, why shouldn't she?" Edgar asked himself, as though talking to some devil suddenly wakening in his breast. Why shouldn't she show Tom photographs? Why shouldn't they talk in that intimate way, and laugh together all at once, and even whisper now and then? It was all obvious enough. Gay was simply at her old game of trying to help on the affair. "I don't care what Elsie says; I shouldn't wonder in the least if they were engaged already," he thought. "And they're waiting to spring it as a surprise." But the surprise, when it was sprung, was so utterly different, it was a shock. Without warning Elsie jumped up from the lounge, where she had been nervously turning the pages of a magazine.

"Well, I guess I'm off," she remarked.

"Off? What do you mean?" demanded Tom, looking up in a startled way; but the girl smiled back at him from the door.

"Oh, I guess you can get along without me here," she answered.

"Why, Elsie, dear!" Gay exclaimed, in reproach.

"Where are you going?" asked Kinkade.

"I promised Madge Stone to come over

tonight. She has just had her adenoids out."

"Then let me go with you for the walk," he suggested.

"No, thanks—I want to be alone." And with one last significant glance at Edgar, Elsie disappeared.

"Well!" said Gay, with a quick forced smile. "Now isn't that just like her?" And to fill the awkward gap, she went on to talk to Tom of Elsie's helter-skelter ways and her big-hearted impulses.

But she did not seem very greatly disturbed, nor did Tom appear to mind being left alone with Gay tonight. Listening from behind his paper, Edgar could not make it out. His thoughts were in a whirl, in fact. What the devil was the meaning of this? So Elsie was not engaged to Tom, and she was jealous—no doubt about that!

"By George!" he inwardly exclaimed. "What a petty, morbid, jealous mind!" And to make it quite clear that he himself felt not a trace of such jealousy now, he put down his paper and tried for a time to enter pleasantly into the talk.

But Gay shot a look at him almost as cold as the one he had received from her upstairs; and when he turned from her to Kinkade, he met with a blandly discouraging smile. For a lad whose sweetheart had just run off, Tom seemed amazingly content! And he looked secretive, too. Obviously both Gay and he wanted to be left alone!

As this disturbing certainty forced itself on Edgar's mind, he was seized with an emotion so utterly new and strange to him, that before he knew it, like Elsie herself, he had muttered some grim, sharp excuse about having work to do tonight, and had gone to his study across the hall; and there, as he sat down at his desk, he found that his fists were both clenched tight!

He gave a strange little laugh at himself. "What a darned young fool I am!" he thought. Was he going to be like Elsie? No! Slowly forcing himself to relax, with a smile which was almost a scowl, Edgar took out from a drawer his income-tax return for the year, and resolutely went to work.

ONLY now and then, unconsciously, he listened to the murmur of voices and low, sudden bursts of laughter from the room across the hall. Queer, how very bewitching Gay's low voice and her happy laugh sounded now in her husband's ears! So did her face, as from time to time he glanced across at her over there. Gone completely was his fear that Gay was running all to seed; it had been replaced by an emotion which made Edgar's blood run cold! But angrily he shook it off, each time that it came creeping in, and with a smile he told himself what a nice little gown she was wearing tonight.

The living-room, too, had filled itself in some mysterious fashion with a charm he had never seen before. For in the curious feverish mood which had come to Edgar Brant, everything about his wife, and everything in this home of his, had suddenly grown desirable to a most maddening degree. Yes, he had to admit to himself that Gay had fixed up this old house in a way that made it distinctive. A cozy, homy little place where a man could call his wife his own.

Barely noticing that he did so, he took out his watch two or three times. Ten—ten-forty—eleven-fifteen! When was that young whippersnapper going to get out of here? Ah! Kinkade had risen at last and was coming out into the hall. Gay followed; and while he put on his coat, they laughed together, then whispered a bit.

"Good night, Kinkade!" poor Edgar cried, in a voice that he meant to be genial.

"Good night, old man." And the hall door slammed.

"Now what the devil?" Edgar asked himself. His wife was already going upstairs. Something was boiling in him now, and as he glared at his tax return he heartily cursed the government of the entire U.S.A. "A bunch of bum politicians!" he thought. He would have no more of it tonight.

Slamming shut the drawer of his desk, Edgar went down to see to the furnace. After that, he closed the house, put out the lights and went upstairs.

"COMING to bed, dear?" asked his wife. As she sat at her dressing table, she seemed to be smiling to herself.

"I am."

"Did you leave a light in the hall?"

"Who for?"

"Elsie."

"No," he growled. "Let her come to bed in the dark!"

"Why, Edgar! What's the matter, dear?"

"Nothing's the matter—nothing at all!"

He went into the bathroom, shut the door, quickly undressed and brushed his teeth, drew on his pajamas with a jerk, came back to the room and got into his bed. Still silence. Would she never speak out and excuse herself for the way she had acted with Tom tonight? No—she wouldn't—not a word! "If there's anything on the face of the globe like a woman's mind, I'd like to see it!" Edgar savagely told himself. Gay finished undressing, put out the light and got quietly into her bed.

"Good night," she said.

"Good night," he growled.

He lay there sleepless! "Now why in the name of common sense can't she come out with it?" Not a word! "All right, let her sleep! They can't fool me—and I don't propose to let this thing worry me one little bit!"

And he did not let it worry him. So sternly unworried did he become that he lay there sleepless till the dawn. He got up the next morning and took a bath. He then cheerfully shaved—and cut himself—for the first time in months—but only laughed. At breakfast he watched Gay's happy face and only smiled—benignantly; and when just before he left for the office, young Elsie grabbed him in the hall and whispered, "Well, *now* what do you think?" he replied, with emphasis, "Oh, Elsie, don't be such a fool!"

All day at his office, too, he kept clear of any such thoughts as hers, and put real pep into his work. It is true that he made some unwonted mistakes—broke a roll on the dictaphone and forgot an appointment with a chap whom he had been trying to see for weeks. But this was natural enough in a man who had missed his sleep the night before. He was a bit tired, that was all; he had very foolishly let himself get all stirred up last evening by something so ridiculous that he was already ashamed of himself.

About four o'clock he decided to go home early and take a nap. It was not that he was worried or anxious—not a bit, he told himself, as he walked rapidly uptown. There was no need at all of walking so fast, for he knew exactly what he would find when he reached the house.

But he was not ready, it appeared; for when he came into his house and found young Elsie on the sofa, her face buried in the pillows, sobbing as though her heart would break, Edgar jumped like a skittish horse.

"WHAT'S the matter now?" he asked. Elsie moaned. "And where is Gay?"

"She's gone! She's gone!"

"What do you mean?"

"With Tom!"

"Elsie!"

"Oh! Oh-h-h!"

"Have you gone clean out of your senses?"

"No! I was simply wild at first! But I'm getting a little more—used to it now—"

Edgar seized her by the arms. "Now you look straight up into my eyes and tell me what's happened. Give me the facts!" he commanded sternly. "She isn't gone—you're crazy! But if anything has happened here, I've got to know, and see what's to be done!"

"There isn't a thing in the world to be done—but to make up your mind to do without her! As I've got to! Oh! Oh-h! It will be easy enough for you! You thought everything was wrong that she did—"

"I did not think everything was wrong that she did!"

"But I," wailed Elsie, "I thought Tom was p-p-perfect!" Again she was shaken by sobs.

"Be practical, can't you?" Edgar cried.

"Practical? Oh!"

"Where is my wife?"

"Oh, let me alone!" begged Elsie. "How should I know where she's gone? All I know is what I heard from the cook! When I came in an hour ago, she told me Gay had packed and gone—with Tom! She saw her—in his arms!"

"Where is she?"

"Who?"

"The cook, of course!" Edgar had started for the kitchen, but Elsie stopped him before he reached the door.

"Oh, *she's* gone! She was packing when I came! She was furious—said she wouldn't stay another day in such a place!"

"Damn that woman!" Edgar cried.

"That hits you, doesn't it?" Elsie wailed. "There'll be no supper *here* tonight—"

"It does not hit me! I tell you I don't believe one single—"

"I can't cook—"

"Who asked you to?"

He was walking the floor. Like fire in his memory now blazed the picture of Gay's face last night, in that happy talk of hers with Tom! But again her sister's wail broke in:

"Remember how Gay used to cook?"

"For God's sake stop thinking of our stomachs!"

"Oh! Oh-h!"

Edgar came to the sofa and gripped the girl again by the arms. "I tell you," he cried between set teeth, "I don't believe one word of this! It's only some wild, crazy dream!"

"It's a dream that will last *you* quite some time—"

"Oh, no, it won't! You're a pretty clever actress, Elsie, but you've overdone your part!" Edgar turned to go upstairs.

"WHERE are you going?" asked the girl.

"Up to the nursery," he said. "Martha will give me the truth about this—"

With a bound Elsie was up from the sofa, confronting him with flashing eyes.

"You dare to speak to her of this! You dare—and I'll leave you, too!" she cried. "Are you out of your senses? Can't you see that she'll up and leave, the minute she knows? She knows nothing about it yet; she has just brought the baby in from the park! You let her alone till you know the facts! You've got a cook to get tomorrow—your day will be busy enough as it is!"

"Will you kindly get out of here?" he asked, his patience at an end.

"I wish I could—I'd like to go—but Gay was counting on me, of course; and much as I hate the thought of her now, I can't leave that poor kiddy alone with you—without a cook or even a nurse! So I'll stand by you—see you through!"

"There's nothing to see me through," he said, persisting in his calm contempt. Again he started for the door.

"And you'll talk it all out with a servant?" demanded his young sister-in-law.

He turned and eyed her. "No," he said. "I'm going up to change my clothes—and rest a bit—till Gay comes home."

Up the stairs he went quietly, taking his time, to the large pleasant room he shared with Gay. But when he came into the doorway he stopped, and felt a chill go down his spine—for disorderly as her mind had been, Gay's room had never looked like this! Hats, gowns, slippers, odds and ends, lay in a heap by the door to her closet; her bureau drawers had been jerked open wide, and various bits of clothing, photographs and God knows what lay scattered all about the floor! Everywhere was evidence of a woman excited, beside herself, packing up in feverish haste!

So instantly infectious was this atmosphere of haste, that before he knew it, Edgar's thoughts were fairly racing in his head—while his eyes darted wildly about the room. They lit on a letter which lay on the floor—and he was on it in one bound. He snatched it up and read as follows:

> Oh, my darling, darling girl! Your message came a few minutes ago. This will be the happiest night of my life! Criticize you? You angel—if ever you hear an unkind word from now until my dying day. But I'm too happy to end this! TOM.

EDGAR started, with eyes coming out of his head. He felt a wave of fury—and then a sickening blank despair. This was replaced, as he walked the floor, by a swift succession of pictures that came flying at him pellmell out of his happy married life—of the night when Gay had said she would take him, the glad proud days which followed that, their wedding trip, the first weeks here, the rapid piling up of joys, until the night their boy was born. Then back went his eyes to the note in his hand, which was crumpled into a tight little ball. Savagely he uncrumpled it, and as he read it once again, there broke from him a strange little laugh. "Criticize? Oh, God!" he groaned. Gay—Gay—a woman like that! And he'd had her—had her as his wife! . . . But then—as though the whole string of his fears had hung by a thread, and the thread had snapped—the wild expression on Edgar's face vanished, and was at once replaced by a look of fierce and obstinate faith. "Yes, and I have her still! She couldn't—neither me nor the kid! This damned letter? Tom wrote it to Elsie! She put it here to scare me! See?" Once more the creeping chill of fear clutched at him, but he threw it from him like a man. "No, it's all bunk," he told himself, "and I'm going to take a bath."

As he resolutely undressed, poor Edgar's self-assurance increased. All his life he had been such a man of habit that his whole mind was filled, as it were, with canals of the spirit, into which, no matter how worried or anxious or indignant he might be, the bark of his soul could enter and find smooth waters, and peace. So it was with him tonight. Edgar had taken so *many* baths. Already, as he threw off his clothes, he could feel the delicious tingling warmth and sting of that needle spray of his—which Gay had given him, bless her heart! The mere idea that such a wife could up and leave her husband was so ridiculous to him now, that unconsciously he smiled his contempt for Elsie and her little joke. As he sat down to take off his shoes, by long habit his eye went to his bed. Yes, there it was—his clean linen laid out—as it always was on Saturday night. When he saw it, he gave such a sharp little laugh that he almost startled himself, so immense was the relief it implied. For who ever heard of a runaway wife leaving out a man's clean underclothes first?

Well, so much for Elsie's joke. Thank God, she had taken Tom at last. Catching sight of the crumpled note on the floor as he rose, he calmly kicked it aside. "She'll marry him now, and I'll have some peace and quiet in my home," he thought. He went into the bathroom and closed the door. "But wait now, let's be fair to the girl," he told himself good-humoredly. Had she been all wrong in her little joke? Perhaps he *had* been a bit hard on Gay. Queer how all the wonderful points of his sweet winsome little wife now came into Edgar's mind. "Yes, by George, I've been a fool! I've criticized a lot of things that were none of my damned business," he thought, "and from now on, by golly, I'll just let well enough alone." Quietly stepping into the tub, he prepared for the stinging, life-giving heat that would descend upon him.

A MOMENT later Edgar got such an icy shock that he leaped from the tub almost with a shout. "Good Lord! What's happened to that spray?" The icy deluge, coming on top of those chills of the spirit, was too much for Edgar Brant! If his shower had gone back on him, his home indeed must be in a bad way! He could not stop to reason it out—he was shivering too violently. Fiercely snapping together his jaws, he thought, "I must get to the bottom of this!" He jumped to the washstand. No hot water there! So the heater was out! And the heater was over the kitchen stove! So the fire was out! The cook *was* gone! And if Elsie had told the truth about that, how about the rest of her yarn? It is one thing to have faith in your wife while you are taking a warm shower bath—it is quite another thing when your teeth are chattering with cold! As Edgar threw on his dressing-gown, he heard a knock on the bathroom door.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"There's no hot water for baby's bath," the hard grim voice of the nurse replied. "The cook is gone. She left at noon. The fire is out in the kitchen stove, and not a thing cooked for supper tonight."

As he listened, Edgar's blood congealed. For if ever a nurse sounded glum enough to serve notice on a defenseless man, Martha was that nurse tonight! With desperate calm he answered:

"I'll attend to it, Martha, at once."

"It's Saturday," was her grim reply, and muttering she went away.

Edgar dashed out of the bathroom then and ran down to the kitchen. Yes, Martha was right! The kitchen stove was as cold as the sink! On the table lay some packages—food, no doubt, for supper tonight. He tore open one of them. Raw meat! He dropped it with an imprecation, ran to the cellar for wood and coal, came back and picked up a newspaper, crumpled it up and struck a match. But just as he was about to cram the lighted paper into the stove, his eye was caught by one of the headlines: "Famous Film Star Wins Divorce."

With a snarl like that of a tiger at bay, Edgar crammed it out of sight—and then, as the blaze of it appeared, and he threw in the kindling wood, he made one desperate last attempt to come to his senses, and look at this right. "I tell you the whole thing's cooked up! A joke, and nothing but a joke—and a damned poor joke at that!"

The wood was nicely blazing now and he could feel the grateful warmth. "A damned poor joke and a damned poor stove!" Edgar grumbled manfully. "I always told her we should have gas!" What a medieval place this whole kitchen was! Yes, and so was the whole house, and Gay's fool way of running things! He piled on coal and shut the lid. For a moment he tried to grumble still. But in spite of him the chill came back—the lonely, sickening sense of fear, of emptiness, of goneness.

Suddenly this whole home of his appeared to him, with all its faults, so like a little paradise of comforts and of quiet joys, that shivering and standing there he looked scared, beaten, shaken, lost. Slowly he turned, went out of the kitchen and started up the steep back stairs. But as he opened the door at the top he heard a sweet familiar voice that made his heart leap in his breast.

"WHY, Elsie!" Gay was asking. "Who under the sun has been in my room?"

"I have," came the grim reply.

"But what in the name of common sense do you mean by throwing my things about?" retorted Gay indignantly.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Elsie. "What's the use?"

"No use at all," said Edgar, as he walked calmly into the room. "There's been about enough of this."

"Enough of what?" demanded his wife. "For heaven's sake, what has been happening here?"

"Where have *you* been, Gay?" he asked abruptly.

"I've been simply running my legs off all day trying to get a cook," she exclaimed, "in time for the celebration tonight!"

"What celebration?"

"What?" she demanded. And turning on Elsie: "Haven't you told him about it even yet?"

"Oh, I've told him a lot of things!" was her young sister's grim reply.

"But you said last night that you wanted to break the news to him yourself!"

"I gave him some news that broke him, all right," said Elsie with a little smile.

"It did nothing of the kind!" he snapped.

Gay's fast increasing bewilderment had become blank astonishment now. "Well, for a girl who has just been engaged since yesterday afternoon," she said, "you're beyond my comprehension!"

"Thank God I am!" was the quick reply. "I've done my level best for you, Gay. Before I left this happy home I thought I'd stage a little scene, to give this critic on your hearth a little of the shock he needs. But you've spoiled it now—you're hopeless—and Tom and I will celebrate this evening somewhere else," she said. "He's waiting for me now downstairs." And the next moment she was gone.

"Edgar," asked Gay, at the end of a pause, "will you please tell me, dear, just what has been happening here?"

"Oh, nothing," was the calm reply. "Just one of Elsie's little jokes." But Gay persisted till she had at least the principal facts in the case. A curious look then came in her eyes—of wistful, deep anxiety.

"And did you for one moment believe that I could run away?" she asked.

"I did not!" her husband lied; but at this answer, to his surprise, he caught disappointment in her face.

"Oh, Edgar, darling, not for a moment? Have I become so utterly tame—and dull—and unexciting, dear?"

EDGAR'S answer was swift, but it took some time; and the words he used were too incoherent and foolish to be printed here—but he spoke with such intensity that all her doubts were set at rest. With a radiant smile of content she exclaimed:

"Edgar, you were! You were really scared!" And she gave him a little hug of delight. "Now run along, you foolish boy, and have a good hot shower," she said.

As though the whole tide of glad relief, within her husband's tortured soul, had suddenly found a familiar channel, Edgar's expression began to change.

"I don't believe I will tonight. In fact, the water's cold," he said.

"What?" his wife asked anxiously. "No hot water for Baby's bath?"

"Oh, I'll see to that," he said. "We'll get it hot in an hour or so. But if you could just make up your mind, my dear, to have a gas stove out there in the kitchen—"

"Now, Edgar," said Gay sharply, "please don't begin on that again! If we have a gas range, we'll have to put in a separate water heater, too!"

"Not at all," he answered patiently. "As I've told you half a dozen times, there's a new automatic thing you can buy—"

"But we can't buy! We haven't the money! I'm overdrawn again as it is!"

"What? Overdrawn again?" he cried.

But Gay had gone to the nursery.

The Story *in the* Bottle

A Modern Mutiny at Sea Brings Back into Its Own the Dramatic Old Way of Fighting Battles in the Single Combat of Two Champions

By Roderick W. Siler

I, DAVID ELDERHOOD, senior doctor on the coolie emigrant clipper ship *Beulah*, forty-three days out of Calcutta bound for Trinidad in the West Indies, do here take the opportunity to set down those experiences which in the last forty-eight hours have so tried the souls of all white men on this vessel. It is my intention to place this last record in a bottle and cast it into the sea when the coolies make their final rush, as they inevitably will.

It is about midnight—eight bells if there were some one to strike the hour. The night is calm, strangely so for this position, in mid-Indian Ocean due east of Madagascar by the captain's reckoning. I am in my cabin, under the poop of the ship. All this after part is held by us—or the twenty-one of us remaining out of thirty-five alive yesterday morning. We have barricaded ourselves in, and have the sweep of the main deck from those cabin windows looking forward.

I hear faintly the sound of the Indians' drums from the fore part of the ship. I can hear the wounded boatswain, Braden, lying in the cabin next to mine, groaning. Through the open port of my cabin I can hear the sea softly sobbing over the horrors of this ship. I can hear the voice of Captain Harr as he talks to the men at our defenses. Harr does well enough now. And yet it is he beyond all others who is responsible for the fate which has overtaken the *Beulah*. Madame Louvet gave warning that he would ruin us. She spoke too truly. . . .

There was a curse upon the voyage from the first. I arrived in Calcutta from England, ten days before the *Beulah's* sailing, to find the ship's old captain, Morris, down on his back with fever. The coolies had already been brought in and were awaiting embarkation. The question of finding a master for the ship became a burning one. Plainly, Morris was not to be considered. Because of sickness and the lateness of the hour there seemed not a captain available in Calcutta—until the agent in an evil moment suggested Harr.

"This Harr is a capable sailor but a bad man," Agent McPherson told me bluntly. "He has been in the East for fifteen years and, by reputation, always disreputable. On shore he runs to wine and women. At sea his ventures are ever illicit ones, along the coast and among the islands. Shall we risk him? It is for you to decide, doctor. Do you want to chance your coolies with him?"

I hesitated. I knew well enough that every day's delay in getting to the West Indies meant to the Company that much more expense in supporting four hundred Indian coolies. But I also knew that the wrong captain in the ship might mean much sickness and death. It might mean worse.

"Harr wants to get back to England," went on McPherson. "He has put by some money and perhaps wants a change of air for a few months. We can offer him a chance to take the *Beulah* to Trinidad, and from there to England. He'll drive the ship, that we know; and of course a quick voyage is money in the Company's pocket and, for that matter, money in yours, doctor. He'll bully the crew, to be sure; and he'll abuse the coolies—if you let him. Would you risk it?"

I could see the agent was for engaging Harr. And indeed, what else was there to do? We might wait weeks to get a better man.

"Let us take a look at this Harr," I suggested.

We found him at his lodgings, Hadley Road, Calcutta, where a native waved a punkah over him while he sipped drinks. He looked his reputation. He seemed the very man to lead pirates. I should say he looked less a seaman than an adventurer. The marks of the weather were on his face, without doubt, but the good cut of his clothes, the bold rather than honest cast of his face, the very language he used, indicated he could upon occasion play the part of a man-about-town, and that he preferred being taken for such.

McPherson stated our errand. From the first, Harr made it clear he was not hot for the place. He understood, no doubt, that we came to him because there was no one else to go to; that with the *Beulah* safe at Trinidad the Company would trouble itself little about the future of Harr. It would be a roundabout way to England, said the captain; and he added, "This transporting of coolies is hardly the work for a reputable mariner." This from a man who for fifteen years had led cutthroats!

Yet the agent and the captain settled the matter between them the next day, Harr signing the papers, and the Company agreeing to pay him a substantial sum for his efforts.

MY NEXT sight of Captain Harr was on the ship. He had brought the *Beulah* down the river, the day before, to the depot where we had our coolies ready for embarkation. I believe I was the last soul aboard, being kept ashore gathering certain medical supplies for my coolies until the last minute. But my assistant, Dr. Durga Singh, an Indian, had seen to it that all the natives were aboard and as happy as people could be who in all probability were leaving the land of their birth forever.

From the poop the captain dominated the ship, which was as he should. And yet that which struck me again as I noted him was his dapper, slippery look, so foreign to the bluff and honest appearance that we commonly associate with the commanders of our ships.

From my cabin under the poop I went down immediately between decks, to the coolies' quarters, on this ship especially fitted up for them. There was of course some hubbub there; there were in progress some efforts to set up housekeeping by those in for a three months' voyage, and a certain amount of weeping and wailing. This was to be expected among emigrants, 250 men, 150 women and children. I had never yet passed down the river on an outward-bound coolie ship without experiencing this scene. Our tug had us well in tow by now; the poor devils between decks could catch glimpses of the banks of their beloved Hugli passing rapidly by, and it is no wonder that they grieved.

As I stood talking to Durga Singh something happened which, delightful at the moment, gave no hint of the sinister consequences to follow it. A woman's voice at my elbow crying out, "David Elderhood! David Elderhood!" turned me about very quickly.

There stood an Indian woman, a pretty one, albeit in native costume and tricked out with all the excess of heavy jewelry dear to the feminine Indian heart. Yet she spoke with the perfect accent of an English girl. More remarkable, her face, set off though it was by eastern costume and gewgaws, displayed an openness, a gaiety, a confidence never to be found among women brought up in the subordinate station occupied by the sex in India.

"You know me, David Elderhood?" she went on. "You remember me?"

"Madame Louvet!" I exclaimed.

She laughed joyfully.

"Ten years, and you remember me!" she cried.

I could have told her that remembering her was no effort; but a thought for my own position at the moment, and doubt as to just what was hers on this ship, held my tongue. With wonderful understanding she said, "I will tell you all later," and she smiled and left, a very superior-looking Indian walking at her elbow.

I was busy for some time getting things straightened out here below, for in the morning we would be in the Bay of Bengal, with our passengers, in all probability, concerned only with their first touch of seasickness. I gave directions to Durga Singh and our sixteen Indian sirdars, who were to police between decks; and I returned to the main deck. I never tired of the Hugli scenery, whether the luxuriant tangle of tropical vegetation, or the native villages, or the dreary swamplike country at the mouth of the river. But on this particular passage I thought less of Indian scenery than of a Madame Louvet of ten years before, the sixteen-year-old Indian bride of the sixty-year-old French doctor at Guadeloupe.

We came to anchor in the evening, to wait for a higher water to carry us over the sand-bars at the mouth of the river. At midnight, with the moon full and silence brooding over the low and desolate river banks here, we brought up anchor. Or at least we tried to, an unpleasant incident temporarily preventing it. A corpse, that of some native worshiper who had cast himself into the sacred Ganges, was caught in the anchor chains, and the sudden jamming of the anchor, and above all the bellowing of Captain Harr, was positively shocking and sinister in the silence of the night.

Finally, at the captain's commands, the body was chopped away piecemeal, and as if this were not sufficient relief to his feelings, Harr yelled a commentary upon India and her customs that was not lost upon some of the natives in the ship.

EXCEPTIONALLY fine weather followed us right to the Indian Ocean, but under the unfortunate influence of Harr this favor of Providence was turned to bad account. On the second day out from the Hugli I was able to speak to Madame Louvet. In good weather it was my practice to have our passengers take a turn on the main deck each day, the women and children coming up in one group, the men in another. This arrangement permitted me, on the second day, to talk with Madame Louvet away from curious native eyes in the crowded quarters between decks.

As soon as we were together in a somewhat secluded corner I said to her:

"For forty-eight hours I have been trying to speak with you—Proserpina."

"Proserpina!" she murmured. "The name Dr. Louvet gave me! I wondered if you would still call me that!"

"I hope I may always call you that," I told her. "And why are you on the *Beulah?*"

She quickly told me the story. Dr. Louvet had been dead four years. Her own parents, from whom the eccentric Frenchman had taken her to educate her and marry her, were dead. Left a wealthy woman, Madame Louvet had felt herself an alien among the whites to whom her husband's standing had introduced her. She had felt a longing to return to the land of her birth, which she had left as a babe. It, too, she had found alien; horribly so, she told me with tears in her eyes. But it was in the woman, the pupil of Dr. Louvet, to make the best of matters, and she was returning to the West Indies among this company of humble natives, and living and dressing as they did.

"It is as my parents did," she said to me. "And they were good people. Dr. Louvet told me so. As he also told me, as you may remember, that he should always owe me much for having taken me from my humble parents, and educating me and filling my head with knowledge, and making me the wife of a white man. He carried me off, he said, as Pluto carried Proserpina off to Hades!"

She smiled, thinking of the Frenchman who had been both a husband and a father to her—and a very good friend of mine.

"You remember," she continued, "how he would have you and me walk alone together. And I was sixteen and you but twenty-five."

"Dr. Louvet was above small suspicions," said I.

"Ah, you were honorable, too," she replied, "and never abused his confidence."

We were getting on ground where I cared not to tread with her. She understood, for she said:

"You are unchanged. You and I are of different peoples still, are we not? I—I hardly know what I am."

She sighed, and I hastened to say. "You are a very dear little woman."

I then asked who was the Indian man

with her so much below. She replied simply:

"Gug Litt. An excellent man. But his ways are not my ways."

It might have been thought that with such fine weather as we had, the *Beulah* would have been a happy ship. She was not. Captain Harr kept her stirred up. The crew, Liverpool men hand-picked by Captain Morris, had for Harr from the first the degree of dislike felt by honest tars for the rogues in their profession. Had Harr had any great ambition to remain with the Company he might have put some restraint upon himself; but he cared not and he bullied the men. Neither did he show any heart or judgment in dealing with our coolies, and his unreasonable commands which affected the four hundred between decks were in no wise softened in the transmitting by the exasperated sailors. There was constant friction between coolies and crew, while all united in detesting the captain. We should have been better off with heavy weather, which would have kept the Indians too sick to grumble and the crew busy handling the ship. Without fully realizing the seriousness of matters, I felt that conditions on the *Beulah*, going down the Bay of Bengal, were more unpleasant than ever I had encountered on any other ship.

DAILY I had my chat with Madame Louvet on the main deck. It was not to be expected that our meetings would be unnoticed, but I was somewhat surprised when Captain Harr made free to comment upon them.

It was my privilege, as senior doctor, to eat at the captain's table, and with old Morris back at the head of the board this would have been enjoyable, the weather being what it was. But Harr never struck me as an ideal table mate. At dinner we two always ate alone in solemn glory, the steward dividing his attention between us. The provender was good and the cooking was good, but the company was lacking. Speaking plainly, I regarded Harr as a blackguard, and his efforts to draw me out at dinner, or even worse, to let himself out, strengthened my opinion. He was always contemptuous and blasphemous concerning his betters, and yet he would, upon occasions, whine over the Fate which had cast him upon the sea and out of the society he would have adorned. He was for making a confidant out of me the first two weeks of the voyage, apparently honoring me with a position in that society from which Fate had tumbled him. I could not reciprocate. All else I could have forgiven in him, however, except the fact that toward the weak, whether they were women or coolies or common sailors, he was a bully and a brute.

At dinner, on the tenth day out of the Hugli, he said:

"You have made a conquest, doctor."

Coming from him, this remark contained nothing complimentary to Madame Louvet. Had it been concerning any other woman on the ship I suppose I would have ignored it. As it was, I determined to make it clear to him at once that Madame Louvet was no common coolie woman.

"The lady happens to be the widow of an old friend of mine, Dr. Louvet of Guadeloupe," said I. "She has been bred and educated according to the best European standards. And she is probably wealthy enough to buy the *Beulah* and everybody in it."

He seemed surprised. "What in the devil is she traveling down there among the coolies for?" he asked.

"Perhaps because she is of Indian blood," I replied. "Perhaps because she is a woman. Perhaps because of the teachings of Dr. Louvet, who was a man of wisdom. You will notice, Captain Harr, that though Madame Louvet is just now among her people she is yet in manner as in dress very much superior to them."

He was good enough to grant this, though he added: "Once an Oriental always an Oriental, doctor. Yet a nice catch she would be. Wealthy, young, and pretty, too, if a man don't object to the copper color."

"I don't know that Madame Louvet is desirous of being caught," I informed him. "But if she is caught she will ask for something more in the man than merely a white complexion."

TWO weeks later this conversation bore fruit when Madame Louvet, in one of our meetings on the main deck, remarked to me:

"The captain has honored me with a visit."

She said this with a smile that was not wanting in sarcasm. I stared in surprise.

"In fact," she continued, "it is the third time he has so honored me in the last week. He is always flattering. He tells me I am too good for between-decks, that I should occupy one of the cabins in the stern of the ship, and that I should eat at the captain's table. And he has invited me to do these things."

"And what did you say to that?" I asked slowly.

"I refused!" she flashed out. "Because it would be the gossip of you English, because it would disgust my own people, and because Captain Harr is far from being the gentleman he thinks he is."

"Bravo!" I applauded.

Ten days later she had something more serious to tell me. Her face showed it before she spoke.

"Captain Harr struck Gug Litt today!" she announced.

"For what reason?" I demanded; though perhaps I could have guessed.

"Captain Harr has been coming down daily to talk with me," she exclaimed. "I have not encouraged him. He has insisted that, when we converse, all others fall back, leaving us alone. This is not good for me, nor for my people, who see it. Today I insisted that Gug Litt, who alone has the necessary courage, remain with me while Captain Harr spoke. Captain Harr ordered Gug Litt away. Gug Litt refused. Captain Harr struck him."

"Harr is mad!" I exclaimed.

"Let him beware!" she said earnestly. "Gug Litt is not a person who will either forget or forgive!"

I thought of Gug Litt, that well-featured native with the eyes one meets occasionally in India, wherein smolders the very devil. I would have hesitated long before striking him.

At dinner this day I spoke to Harr. "I understand there was some trouble between decks today, Captain Harr," I said.

"I suppose your friends from below have informed you of it," he replied, with a sneer.

"Madame Louvet told me of it."

He gave me a hard look. My position was not easy. He and I were the chief men on the ship, and while in the ordinary run of affairs it was within my power to have a captain discharged at the end of a voyage, while the voyage was in progress the captain was all-powerful and a law unto himself. I could expect Harr to remind me of this. Nevertheless, I made bold to say:

"I doubt if much good will result from striking any of the natives."

"Much good!" he yelled. "Do you think that before I knock down one of these niggers I'll stop to think how much good or how much bad it'll do?"

"I would advise your doing that very thing," I told him. "Please remember, sir, that while you are responsible for the ship I am responsible for the coolies."

He was by now flared up in truly piratical fashion. But I concluded:

"I am, as you may realize, peculiarly interested in Madame Louvet. However you may see fit to treat our other passengers, I demand that you treat her with respect."

I looked him full in the eye, and then walked from the table before he could make any outrageous reply. I did not want to threaten or be threatened. I had, in fact, said too much already.

FROM this time Harr may be said to have literally run wild. Though I did not know it then, I had heretofore acted as a restraint upon the man. He had previously been showing off. With me definitely ranged against him he defied the ship, and with such wild arrogance that I now have some doubts as to the complete sanity of the man. All the devilishness, recklessness, or insanity that made him what he was, now showed. In nothing was he so insane as in his attentions upon Madame Louvet, which became the scandal of the ship. Almost daily he would visit Madame Louvet between decks, since she would not visit him, and conduct himself in a way that stirred up the devil in the natives and disgusted his own crew, from the first officer down. He was, as I have said, like a man insane or drunk. I had sailed many a league, but never before had I so experienced the feeling of helplessness. In his absolute power as captain, Harr was driving us to catastrophe, yet we could do nothing. To my knowledge, Madame Louvet was the first to foresee what was coming.

I had told her I intended protesting to Harr again.

"Do not do so," she advised. "He will do something to drive my people to desperation."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"There is great anger down there," she said, and pointed down between decks. "The captain has openly abused India and Indians; he has struck an influential man; he has cursed the sirdars who were put there to watch their own countrymen, and they hate him. And the sailors have followed the captain's example."

She paused, then said, "He has asked me to marry him."

"And I hope you have refused him!" I exclaimed.

"I did not," she told me. "I now encourage him. I thought I might thus curb his tongue and his insolence. For the rest, we must put our faith in Heaven. The voyage may end in blood. But if it does not and we reach Trinidad I will tell Captain Harr I have changed my mind, and that he had better be on guard against Gug Litt."

I must admit at the moment the news of Harr's wooing Madame Louvet troubled me more than did any thought of Indian uprising, which I regarded as impossible.

"You should not have given Harr any encouragement," I said.

"Why should you mind?" she asked. And she added quickly: "On this ship I am only a poor Indian woman, since I choose to be such. But in the West Indies I am the widow of Dr. Louvet. I shall not fear Captain Harr there."

PROVIDENCE now appeared to be against us. We ran into days of dead calm, very unusual for our location at this time of year. The *Beulah*, a ship able to make headway with as little wind as any craft I ever knew, lay helpless, rolling with the considerable swell and pointing her nose at every point of the compass in turn. It was very hot. The ship had experienced nothing like it since she lay under awnings at Calcutta. If Harr had an ambition (beyond his attentions upon Madame Louvet) it was to make this a quick voyage; so that besides the physical discomfort of our present situation he was forced to chafe at not getting on. The crew, too, under their breath, cursed the captain and openly swore at the natives. As for the latter, they were no doubt influenced by the sultry weather toward their infernal outburst.

Only a few hours before the coolie attack I was down between decks. It was stifling there. It seemed too hot for mischief, or for anything else requiring effort. Yet, as I think of it now, there was something up, the Indian men being clumped together, and two of them from opposite corners beating weird, continuous sounds out of their small native drums. I can see now that all this, with the anxious look of the women, presaged something; but between my discomfort from the heat, and my feeling that no human being would exert himself under such circumstances, I overlooked all omens. I caught Madame Louvet's eye and smiled, and she (I remember now) did not smile in return. I expected to get the women and children up on deck soon for an airing, and would visit with Madame Louvet then.

Ten minutes before hell with all its terrors burst upon us I spoke to Davis, the first officer. He was a big, untalkative man, a good officer, steeped in the practices and ethics of the sea. He detested Harr, but had the captain ordered him to drive the ship onto the African coast he would have done so. He looked up into the rigging now, upon his flat canvas, and I saw him purse his lips to whistle softly.

"Where's the wind, Mr. Davis?" I asked.

"Ah, that's it: where is it?" he replied. "'Tis strange to be without it hereabouts."

"The coolies are stewing between decks," said I. "If they had their way they would likely be in the rigging."

"'Tis well," said he calmly, "we have the Indian police to keep them where they belong."

He referred to the sirdars. The sirdars! In a few minutes they would be the first to follow Gug Litt in the assault. Davis left me, walking on to his fate somewhere in the fore part of the ship.

The afternoon was well along. I looked out over the Indian Ocean lying like a glass to the horizon. At the moment all was singularly quiet, there coming not a murmur from below, not even the eternal and melancholy beating of an Indian drum.

The next instant there rose a yell, suddenly extinguished. There followed an awful uproar from between-decks, and I heard shots. I stood on the main deck not far forward of the poop. Toward the bow was a deckhouse, containing the cook's galley and the hospital; and just in front of the house were the steps leading to the deck below. I began to move toward them with several of the crew; but before I reached the steps there emerged from below a sailor, almost stripped, and bleeding from several wounds. Following him was a woman, and seeing me she rushed toward me. It was Madame Louvet.

"Save yourself before it is too late!" she cried.

"What has happened?"

"Gug Litt and the sirdars are leading the Indian men in a mutiny. I have seen half a dozen sailors shot or struck down."

I hesitated, and she continued:

"Get what men you can and fortify yourselves in the cabins in the stern. The Indians are raging, they will be up here in a moment, and a number of them are armed!"

THE first mate, Davis, whose watch it was, had vanished, and as we never saw him again he must have been stabbed and thrown overboard. Captain Harr and the second officer had not yet appeared; but coming on the run from the poop was the third mate. As he neared the steps leading below, one of the sirdars armed with a pistol appeared there and shot him down. This ended my hesitation, and I yelled to the men of the off watch, now streaming out of the forecastle, to get themselves into the stern cabins.

I found myself trying to draw Madame Louvet with me.

"I cannot leave you with those savages!" I cried.

"I must remain with them; they are my people!" she insisted. "Perhaps I may be of use to you and to them later!"

She was not to be changed.

"God bless you!" I told her, and pressed her hands.

"Go!" she warned. "Go before it is too late!"

Just forward of the deckhouse the coolies were gathering as they came up from below; a fact which sealed the fate of any sailors remaining in the forecastle. I ran back, and met Harr, without hat or coat, coming out from under the poop. He seemed intent on charging the coolies single-handed, until two of them came out from the cover of the deckhouse and fired at him with pistols.

"Our only chance is to hold them!" I yelled.

Harr was not lacking in courage, but it became clear to him that twenty sailors could not overcome two hundred and fifty fanatical Indians.

"All hands in there!" commanded Harr pointing under the poop; and an instant later those of us remaining, even to the man at the wheel, had run under, had closed the heavy doors there, and were barring the windows of the cabins which looked out onto the main deck.

None too soon. The coolies came with a rush, and we heard them howl on the other side of the door, and their feet patter on the poop deck overhead. The builders of the *Beulah* must have intended these stern cabins as a place of last defense in case of trouble, for doors and walls were here exceptionally heavy, and there was no skylight to permit possible entrance from the deck above. There were hinged iron shutters for the cabin windows which swept the main deck; and these shutters had narrow, vertical slits in them through which a gun could be fired; so that the builders could not be charged with negligence. But we were short of arms and ammunition. It had been a boast of Morris, the old captain, that no arsenal was necessary on his ship. What firearms we had were the property of myself and the ship's officers; some pistols and some guns for hunting large and small game. While we obtained these weapons and loaded them the coolies threw themselves against our defenses, screaming and threatening; but when we were ready we gave them a sudden volley which left a half-dozen of them writhing on the deck and scattered the rest to cover.

While the coolies got themselves beyond the deckhouse for consultation, we also considered our situation. It was black, indeed. Twenty-one men we had, three of them wounded. Our ammunition was limited. Of food we had practically none. There was water in a large cooler on the captain's table. The ship was drifting, to be found at the mercy of the first gale. We were out of the usual path of ships; too far north for the Australian traffic, too far west for the Indian. Panting for our blood were two hundred and fifty male coolies, possessing some firearms, and having at their command all the food and water of the ship.

From that time until this, when I write this record and the dawn of another day has appeared, we besieged have remained determined but well-nigh hopeless. Twice during the night we repulsed sudden assaults of the coolies, and with considerable loss to them. Harr has here shown some of the qualities of a commander. He could hardly do less, since it is he who has brought us to this pass. I cannot help thinking of Madame Louvet occasionally. If we are massacred and the ship is saved, what will become of her? Several times I have caught glimpses of Gug Litt leading the infuriated mutineers. He does not lack courage.

There is something up. I can make out some agitation at our barricades. Probably another attack, though it is now broad day. If we are overcome I hope to be able to hurl the bottle through a port into the sea.

Later in the same day.

ASTONISHING events have taken place. When I hurried from my cabin to take my place at our defenses I found the men at the iron-shuttered windows in considerable perplexity.

"Are the coolies coming again?" I asked.

"Look!" directed one of the men, indicating that I should look out upon the deck.

I did so. There was no mass of infuriated coolies, but only one person—Madame Louvet!

"I wish to speak to you!" said she, talking to the blank walls before her. Receiving no reply, she continued in a louder voice: "Let me enter! I bring hopes of peace!"

I looked behind me. Harr was present. He showed no signs of granting that which was asked, and again we heard:

"Let me enter! I bring hopes of peace! If Dr. Elderhood is there he will tell you I come in good faith!"

Finding my tongue at last, I said, "I will guarantee there is no treachery."

"Let her in, then!" ordered Harr, though sourly. "And you men at the windows keep your eyes open!"

Madame Louvet was admitted, and we gathered about her as might be expected of men whose hopes of life were at an extremely low ebb.

"My people realize the terrible danger of every one on this ship," said Madame Louvet. "You here will be starved or massacred. Afterward, we who remain will drift to destruction in a ship we are unable to control."

These were facts not to be denied, and we waited for her to continue.

"My people believe they have great grievances. That is the reason for their terrible outburst. Since, they have had time to consider what is in the past and what lies in the future. They are, for the good of all, willing to compromise."

With some astonishment did we hear this mention of compromise from the Indians. Had it come through any one but Madame Louvet I at once would have suspected treachery.

"The compromise is this," went on Madame Louvet. "That Gug Litt shall be permitted to meet Captain Harr in fair fight to the death with knives. He who survives shall be allowed to survive. You English shall then take the ship to a spot on the Indian coast the sirdars shall select. All Indians who care to shall be permitted to land. The ship and your lives are then yours."

At the plan we were astounded, and I think none more so than Harr. At last I managed to say:

"Is it not possible for us to reach a comcompromise, without the spilling of more blood?"

For the first time Madame Louvet showed emotion, in her eyes appearing something of the flame that always smoldered in Gug Litt's.

"HEAR, you English!" she cried. "I it is who have won for you this offer of life! I have told my people that if they kill all the English they, too, perish. Thus have they agreed to take through Gug Litt their vengeance, for it is against Captain Harr they most complain. Whether it is Captain Harr or Gug Litt who survives, my people will live up to that which has been agreed upon!"

Harr it was who suddenly became worthy of all attention. This was for him to decide, and had he refused to meet Gug Litt, no white would have urged him otherwise, I am certain. But suddenly, in a fashion truly piratical yet not without a certain gallantry, he cried:

"I will meet this Indian! He'll send no more offers to meet Samuel Harr!"

"Gug Litt will be glad to hear that," replied Madame Louvet; and as this of all she had said was spoken most quietly, so it was most doubtful of meaning.

In the full glare of the morning sun, on the main deck just forward of the deck-house, the two champions met. I was the only white present, there remaining some fear of treachery. Armed with knives as nearly alike as could be found, stripped to the waist and barefooted, enclosed in a space kept clear by the sirdars, surrounded by four hundred Indians, the two fought to the end.

Harr was the more powerful man, Gug Litt seemed the quicker; and yet outside of the physical they appeared to me much alike. Both handled knives as if possessed of experience with such weapons, a rather surprising accomplishment in an Englishman if not in an Indian. In actions and looks both men gave something of the impression of the tiger; which, perhaps, in an Englishman is something that Indians could not forgive.

Harr was the first to draw blood, slashing Gug Litt across the chest. The wound was nothing, though the coolies gnashed their teeth at it. It made a bounding, gleaming-eyed being out of Gug Litt, and it made Harr cautious. For some minutes they circled about, feinting, lunging, leaping. Until like a flash Gug Litt jumped forward, plunged his knife into Harr's side and drew it out, and hopped back with the bloody weapon and the look of a devil on his dark face.

This wound was serious. Harr knew it, and Gug Litt, keeping clear until his opponent should collapse, knew it. But Harr, his face ghastly and his life blood visibly pumping away, was determined. He caught Gug Litt at the edge of the circle, and despite the Indian's squirming struck him in the neck, giving him a slash which, given in the same spot, would have finished an ox, I verily believe.

Gug Litt dropped. At the opposite side of the circle was Harr, swaying and leering, with eyes for nothing but his vanquished enemy, and quite indifferent to the mounting rage of the Indians. I expected no less than that he and I would be knifed by every male coolie.

I felt a hand on mine. It was Madame Louvet.

Thus holding my hand—not seeking protection, but giving it—Madame Louvet turned on her people.

"Fools!" she cried in the native tongue, her face as wildly aflame as those about her. "Fools, would you lose all I have gained for you! Would you kill the English who still live, and drown, yourselves! Fools, have I made Gug Litt kill Harr for you in vain! Look—our enemy falls, and we are satisfied!"

Harr tumbled to the deck. I felt a pressure on my hand.

"I have saved you!" whispered Proserpina.

It was Madame Louvet who directed the removal of the dead bodies of Gug Litt and Samuel Harr.

Two weeks later.

THE ship is approaching the Indian coast. Since the mutiny the weather has been propitious. In three days we should be at that point where the sirdars have decided that they and their comrades will disembark. That the story should go into the bottle, and the bottle go overboard, is not then because it is, as first intended, my last message, but because of the wishes of Madame Louvet.

I read the story to her, telling her I was now about to destroy it.

"No!" she objected.

"But—"

"It was to be cast into the deep waters, and into the deep waters it should go," she insisted with feminine consistency. "I command you!"

Madame Louvet rules the *Beulah* and I have learned that on a ship one must always obey.

"Who knows," I remarked to her half jokingly, "but that the message may, after all, serve as first intended. For no future is quite certain which is dependent upon Eastern men and Eastern seas."

"And upon Eastern women!" she added with that strange smile of hers.

DAVID ELDERHOOD.

A Romance of High Places

The Great Samara

The Menace of Fanaticism Toward the Man Who Saved Russia Shows Its Head Again and Catherine Finds Herself at the Door of Death

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

Illustrations by Joseph A. Maturo

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

UPON a house in Fifth Avenue there had converged, on an April evening, as strange a group of men and women as the world could well have shown: a bond salesman, a dealer in automobiles, a maker of artificial flowers, a young woman employed as a stenographer by the typewriting bureau of a great New York hotel!

Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington knew much—and little—of her guests. She knew the names by which some of them went; she guessed what names they had the right, in fact, to vaunt. She knew that Gabriel Samara, the real ruler of present-day Russia, was coming with Miss Catherine Borans, a stenographer from the Weltmore. But the inner meaning of these things she did not know at all, nor how Catherine had come into touch with Samara, arch-foe of her monarchist friends.

Yet it was absurdly simple. He was staying at the Weltmore. He had needed aid in preparing certain memoranda concerning his negotiations in Washington with the President. His secretary had been ill; Catherine Borans had been assigned to help him. By chance she had known that a pretended newspaper man was an impostor; she had frustrated his attempt to kill Samara. . . .

Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington dispensed hospitality in a Fifth Avenue palace that had been built by a multimillionaire of worldwide fame and was purchased by her obedient spouse at the time of the last oil combine. She entertained lavishly and wantonly. Society, diplomacy and even artists, were all alike welcome. Her peculiar fancy, however, was acting as hostess to what she was endeavoring to make known in New York as the "Russian Circle."

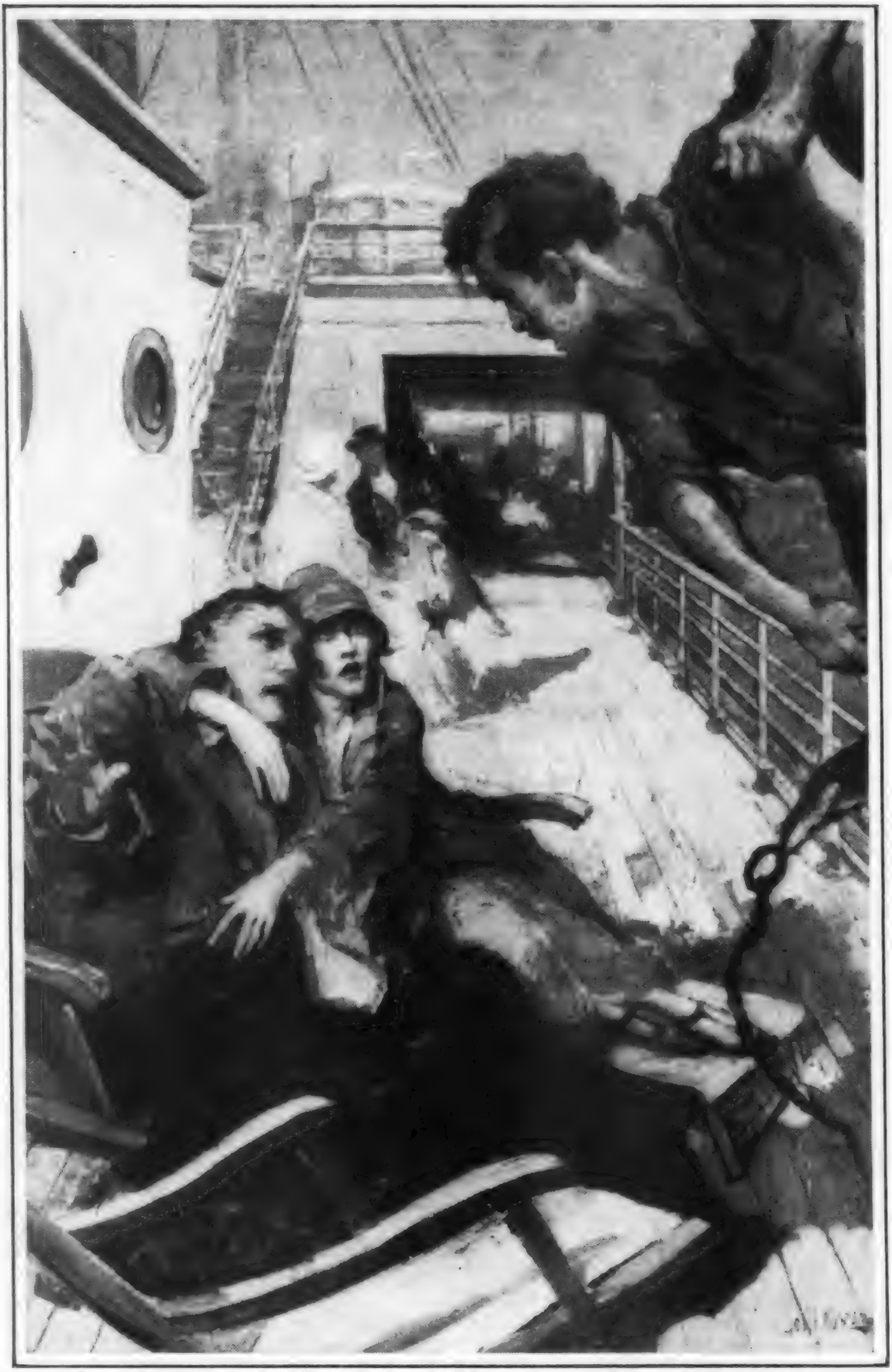
"My dear Saxon," she explained to her husband, "no one knows who these people are. All we do know is that they are aristocrats. There's the grand duchess, of course, and the general, and Colonel Kirdorff—they are the bluest blood in Russia, but those others aren't pulling the wool over my eyes, though they call themselves plain 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.' and 'Miss.' It's my belief there's more of the royal family than one in that little crowd. And Saxon—there's Prince Nicholas now, an Imanoff—"

"Say, what is an 'Imanoff,' anyway?" Mr. Bossington interrupted, giving his coat tails a pull.

"The family name of the Russian royal family," his wife declared in a tone of awe.

Mr. Bossington appeared unimpressed. "Thought they were all wiped out in a cellar or somewheres," he objected.

"All the direct branch were assassinated—murdered," his wife agreed, "in a cellar.



Even as Catherine dragged his face against hers, something hissed in the air and buried itself in the woodwork where Samara's head had been.

The details were too horrible. Some of the others, however, got away, and one or two escaped out of the country. Prince Nicholas is the next heir to the throne of those left alive."

"Well, there isn't going to be any throne," Mr. Bossington observed. "Russia's doing thundering well under her new republic. That fellow Samara has set her going again. I had an offer for some oil concessions from his government today, made me through Washington. I shall have to send a man over next week."

Mrs. Bossington deemed that the time had come for her great announcement.

"Saxon," she said, "tonight I want you to be at your best. Gabriel Samara, the greatest man in Russia, is coming here. You know—he smashed Bolshevism—he is dictator, really—"

"You don't say!" Mr. Bossington exclaimed, properly impressed at last. "Does he know anything about oil, I wonder?"

"Can't you forget oil for one evening?" his wife enjoined angrily. "What I mean, Saxon, is that I want you to be, for tonight at least, the gracious American host and not the typical American business man. We may be invited to Russia. Come right along into the library now. They'll be here before we know where we are."

"What I want to know," Mr. Bossington demanded, as they crossed the hall, "is how our friends and this man, Samara, are likely to pull together, and where on earth did you come across him?"

A major-domo in command motioned to a footman, who threw open the door of a magnificent library. It resembled the interior of a chapel, with vaulted roof, stained-glass windows, and an organ in the far end. There were divans and chairs, a round table at which a score of places were set, and a sideboard, groaning with edibles of every sort, flanked by a long row of gold-foiled bottles. Mrs. Bossington looked around her.

"I guess this is cozy enough for them, Saxon," she observed.

"There's plenty of the stuff anyway," he remarked with a glance toward the sideboard. "But what I want to know is, how did you get hold of this fellow Samara? Those others all seem as if they had stepped out of a dime show, but Samara's the real goods!—as big a man, in his way, as our President!"

"I met him with that little Catherine Borans—the one who is a stenographer at the Weltmore—lunching at the Ritz-Carlton," Mrs. Bossington explained. "Of course it's all stuff and nonsense about her being really a working girl. There isn't one of them has a better air than she has. They are close-mouthed and all," she went on, listening for the bell. "I tried to get the old general, the other day, to tell me who she was. He just smiled and shook his head. The duchess seemed on the point of telling me and then she pulled herself up. 'She is of our order, Mrs. Bossington,' was all I could get her to say."

THE door was suddenly thrown open. The little stream of expected guests began to arrive; a curious company in their way, but each with his own peculiar claim to distinction. General Orenburg, who first bent over his hostess's hand, was ponderous and bulky, his shabby dinner clothes carefully brushed, the ends of his tie a little shiny. Nevertheless, he bore himself as a man with a great past should.

He was accompanied by Prince Nicholas, whose irritation had departed for the evening, but whose manner was still stiff and abstracted. The grand duchess entered the room directly afterward. She had changed her gown since dinner-time and her hair was parted and brushed so smoothly back that it seemed almost like a plastered wig. Cyril Volynia Sabaroff of Perm followed, with his sister Rosa. Behind them came Colonel Kirdorff. They all stood in little groups while a footman served coffee and liqueurs. Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington flitted from one to another, with much to say concerning their expected guest. Her husband listened to the description of a new automobile which some friends of Cyril Sabaroff were soon to put on the market.

"It is ever so good to have you all together!" their hostess exclaimed. "I hope you'll make yourselves comfortable and have your little chat just as though no one were here. There's a table you can sit round, and a bite of supper for you later on. I hope you gentlemen will pay a visit to the sideboard whenever you like."

Prince Nicholas detached himself from the others.

"Your hospitality is wonderful, madam," he declared. "We beg that you will not leave us. Colonel Kirdorff has promised to talk to us tonight about the probable result of the Samara type of government and the general has a few remarks to make about these rumors of demilitarization in Russia."

"How very interesting!" Mrs. Bossington murmured, and sailed away to greet some fresh arrivals—an elderly professor and his wife. . . .

"Will Samara back out, do you think?" General Orenburg asked his neighbor anxiously.

Kirdorff shook his head. "If he promised, he will come," he declared confidently. "I have that much faith in him, at any rate. He is not likely to break his word."

The greater part of the little company was now assembled. They were about a dozen outside the circle of Catherine's immediate entourage; all Russians and ardent monarchists, but of various types and positions in the world. They were barely settled in their places round the table when the eagerly expected event happened. The door was opened and the butler made his announcement.

"Miss Catherine Borans—Mr. Gabriel Samara!"

The newcomers advanced toward their hostess. They exchanged a few words of salutation while Samara bowed low and raised her fingers to his lips. Then Catherine led him toward the table.

"Please, all of you," she said, "I have ventured to bring a visitor to see you. We have been very curious about him, very critical, sometimes censorious. After all, though, we must remember that he is a fellow countryman."

There followed a few moments of tense silence. They were all engrossed in their study of this man, the foremost figure of their country; the man who, from their narrow point of view, stood between them and their desire. Certainly, so far as appearance went, he was at a disadvantage with none of them. He was well groomed, his evening clothes were impeccable, and he possessed to the fullest extent the natural dignity of a man holding a great place in the world.

"Samara! Gabriel Samara," Alexandrina murmured, looking at him through her lorgnette.

"Samara!" the fair-haired Rosa Sabaroff exclaimed, looking at him with undisguised awe.

"Gabriel Samara!" the General said, under his breath, stiffening insensibly.

The attitude of the little gathering toward their visitor could scarcely be called hospitable. The general and Prince Nicholas both inclined their heads, but did not offer their hands. Samara, however, showed no sign of taking offense. His bow to Alexandrina had been the bow of a courtier. He was himself too interested in his own contemplation of the rest of the party to appreciate their lack of cordiality. Mr. Bossington, as if he judged the moment propitious, introduced himself into the circle.

"Mr. Samara," he said, "glad to meet you, sir. I am Saxon Bossington—glad to be your host. There's a proposition about oil they were asking me to look into, somewhere north of the Caspian Sea."

Samara smiled. "You are without doubt, sir, one of the capitalists whom your President mentioned to me," he rejoined politely. "Russia has need of your brains and your money. We think that we can repay all that you have to offer. Our greatest necessity just now is to find employment for a large number of men."

"YOU are really going to demilitarize, then!" Colonel Kirdorff intervened.

Samara, who had been standing a few feet apart, turned once more toward the table.

"You seem to be all my country-people," he observed. "Why should I have secrets from you? It is my intention immediately on my return to Russia to demobilize the whole of our Third Army, consisting of about a million men. I should have done so before if I could have been sure of finding employment for them. My mission over here was to arrange something of the sort."

"What about the Germans?" Prince Nicholas demanded bluntly.

Some part of the geniality seemed to depart from Samara's manner. There was a note almost of hauteur in his reply.

"The armies of Russia," he said, "have been trained and perhaps learned their vocation partly from German officers. Those German officers have been well paid for their labors. For anything else, the army consists of Russian soldiers, bound together for one purpose, and one purpose only—

the defense of their country. In my opinion and in the opinion of my counselors the necessity for their existence on so large a scale no longer exists."

Samara was still standing. The general rose to his feet and indicated a chair.

"Will you join us, sir?" he invited.

There was a breathless pause—the remainder of the handful of monarchists sat spellbound. With a grave bow to the general, Samara accepted the invitation. Prince Nicholas was on his left, the grand duchess a little lower down.

"This is a strange day," the general continued. "We never thought to welcome among us the head of the Russian Republic. I and my friends, Mr. Samara, represent a broken party; yet a party which has yielded everything except hope. We do not desire to commence our acquaintance under the shadow of any false pretense. Prince Nicholas Imanoff here, we acknowledge as the hereditary ruler of Russia. We cannot recognize any other government."

Samara bowed his head. "You have every right to your convictions," he admitted. "If I believed that it were for the good of Russia to once more enter upon a period of Czardom, I should myself immediately accept the monarchical doctrine. But I tell you frankly that I do not believe it. I am a Russian by birth and descent and I think that I have earned the right to call myself a patriot. I have worked—I still work for my country's good as I see it. That is why, with a clear conscience, I have accepted this invitation to come and visit you."

"Our friend speaks well," the general declared, looking around him. "After all, we must not forget that he has accomplished a great deed: he has freed Russia from the Bolshevists, he has destroyed Soviet rule. If the form of government which he has set up does not wholly appeal to us it is still a million times better than the one which he has crushed."

"That is common sense," Kirdorff agreed. "Yet it leaves us with this reflection: Bolshevism and Soviet rule were impossibilities. From that hateful extreme we expected the swing of the pendulum back to the conditions of our desire. Samara here has intervened. He has intervened—happily, perhaps, for Russia, but disastrously for us. While he lives our cause will languish."

There was a tense silence. The significance of those words "while he lives" seemed everywhere to make itself felt. Samara looked around with a faint smile upon his lips—a smile about which there was already a shadow of defiance. It was a strange scene: the eager faces of the little crowd gathered round the table, the wonderful room with its great spaces and unexpected flashes of almost barbaric magnificence, the lavish hospitality displayed upon the huge sideboard, Mr. and Mrs. Saxon J. Bossington, almost grotesque in their position of host and hostess, seated in the background waiting.

"A TRUE accusation," Samara admitted. "But after all I can honestly assure you that I, who know the temper of our country personally, better than you can by the offices of correspondents, have seen few indications of a desire on the part of the people to submit themselves once more to the domination of a monarchy. I had no idea until a few hours ago that I was to have the honor of meeting you this evening—you, Prince Nicholas, or you, general, whose name is still remembered in Russia, or you, colonel, or your Royal Highness. Let me say this to you, if I may: the Bolshevist days and the days of insane hatreds are over. Russia is a free country—as free to you as to me. Why not come back and live in it?"

"Come back!" the general groaned. "My estates—"

"My mines!" Kirdorff muttered.

"They took from me five hundred thousand English pounds," Alexandrina sighed wearily.

"I will be frank with you all," Samara continued. "There is a new code of laws in Russia today. We are prospering to an amazing extent, but we have taken upon our shoulders an immense burden. The Russia of today desires to pay the debts of the past. If I alone had power I would add to those debts the sums and estates of which the Bolshevists deprived you. But in that desire I am almost alone. I spoke of it and my own people listened in silence. But I believe—I believe from the bottom of my heart—that the day will come when Russia will repay you every farthing which you have lost."

"If one could dream of such a thing!" the general faltered.

"My mines are being worked by a Japanese company," Kirdorff sighed.

"There will be difficulties," Samara admitted, "but we shall overcome them. In the meantime, why live in exile? Russia is your country. Russia is open to you. I am not afraid to invite you all freely and wholeheartedly to return—the sentence of banishment against absentee monarchists, I promise you, shall be revoked. I am not afraid of your influence. If Russia, at any time, should want a monarchy, let her have it. I will buy a villa in the south of France, be myself an exile, and grow roses. I am but the servant of the will of the people."

"Rienzi said that before he climbed over their shoulders into power," Kirdorff reminded him, with a curious flash in his eyes.

"Rienzi was a man of more ambitious temperament than I," Samara retorted. "Besides, his scheme of government in those days was less wide-flung. He was a dreamer as well as an idealist; I am a practical man. I desire what is good for Russia, and it is certainly not for her good that any of those who might be foremost among her citizens are living in exile. General, return to Russia and an army corps or a post at the War Office is yours. You, Colonel Kirdoff, shall have a division whenever you choose to apply for it. There is not one of you who shall be deprived of the opportunity of doing useful work for your country. Why sit here and weave impossible dreams? Why not attune your patriotism to the music of real labor?"

"What about me?" Prince Nicholas asked eagerly.

Samara reflected for a moment.

"Prince," he confided, "I will be frank with you. We are living too near the shadow of regrettable days. Come if you will and be sure of my protection so far as it goes. You shall have a commission in the army, but an Imanoff in Russia, even today, must take his chance."

Nicholas nodded. Catherine, who had moved round to his side, looked across at Samara.

"Remember this," she insisted. "If the tide of feeling should flow, at any time, toward the reëstablishment of Russia's real ruler, it is upon Nicholas here that the people's choice must fall."

Samara listened indifferently. Perhaps in that hour of his magnificent and superabundant vitality, when his brain was at its zenith, his vision unerring, the idea of any serious rivalry between him and this pale-faced young man of peevish expression seemed an incredible thing.

"All I can say is," he replied, "that if Prince Nicholas cares to come he is welcome. Such protection as I can afford him, he shall have. If he plots against my government and his plots are discovered, he will be shot. If, by open election of the people or by vote of the Duma, a monarchy is desired, then I shall never lift a hand against him."

The general stroked his gray imperial. Something of the weariness had gone from his face. Something of the languor, indeed, seemed to have passed from all of them. They had listened to a wonderful message. Samara read their thoughts. He rose to his feet.

"I thank you, general, and all of you, for your reception. I fear that in the past you have counted me an enemy. Wipe that out, please. The greatest of possible ties binds us together—our country!"

MISS SADIE LOYES set down the telephone receiver with a little bang. She was obviously annoyed.

"Miss Borans," she announced sharply, "Number 1180 wants you again. Keep a record of your time."

Catherine rose and placed the cover on her machine. Miss Loyes watched her with critical eyes.

"Crazy about you, seemingly," she continued. "They're making such a fuss about him in the papers this morning, I thought I'd go up myself for an hour or so. Knows his own mind, anyhow—you or nobody. What kind of work is it?"

"Not work that you'd enjoy very much, I think, Miss Loyes," Catherine replied, smiling faintly as she thought of the previous morning; "correspondence and documents and that sort of thing. Yesterday afternoon Mr. Bromley Pride interviewed him for the New York *Comet*. He didn't get much of a story, though."

"These foreigners leave me cold," said Miss Loyes. "What we Americans make such a fuss about them for, I don't know. They just come over here for what they can get. One of the papers this morning said that this Mr. Samara has fixed up a loan with the President of something like two hundred millions. Keep your time card carefully, Miss Borans. There's one thing about these Russians, they aren't mean!"

Catherine descended the stairs into the hall and made leisurely progress toward the elevator. On the way the fancy seized her to call in at the florist's shop and buy a single dark red rose which she pulled through the waist-band of her dress. The elevator attendant, who had scarcely noticed her before, watched her disappearing figure with undisguised admiration.

It was a very different sitting-room which Catherine presently entered. There were half a dozen men present and conversation was a little vehement. At her entrance it subsided. Samara motioned her to a chair at the smaller table and proceeded to dismiss his callers.

"I agree," he said. "It seems cowardly but perhaps you are right. At one o'clock Carloss, and at three o'clock the bank president. Louden can make all the arrangements. He had better bring an automobile here and cable Cherbourg."

They drifted away, one by one, Samara himself escorting them through the little hall to the door. Presently he returned and threw himself into an easy-chair.

"Trouble at home, here and everywhere," he remarked grimly. "I've got to hurry home."

"About your demilitarization scheme?" she inquired.

He nodded. "Half the unrest is owing to German influence," he declared. "We've had so many commitments to her in the past that she's grown to look upon these armies as her own. Our people over here are quite right, though. I must get back at once and make a tour through the military district. In the meantime I am going to cable over a proclamation. Ready?"

"Quite," she answered.

He dictated rapidly for half an hour or more. As soon as he had finished he went to a cupboard in which was an array of bottles, mixed himself a drink and tossed it off. Then he sat in his easy-chair with his hands in his pockets and a frown upon his forehead, while she gathered up the loose pages of her work.

"Tell me," he asked abruptly. "What did your friends think of me last night?"

"They were surprised," she admitted.

"Favorably or unfavorably?"

"On the whole favorably. Your offer to them all has made a great stir in their quiet lives."

"It was a serious one," he declared, rising to his feet and pacing the room. "There is no reason why they shouldn't come back. I have nothing against the monarchists so long as they accept the situation and desist from plots. The people against whom I wage war to the death are the anarchists. They are a waning force but I have not done with them yet. I am a humane man but I would kill an anarchist as I would a fly, because of the poison they carry with them."

She looked at him thoughtfully, but she made no remark. Presently he stopped in front of her chair.

"Don't you agree with me—I mean about your people?" he demanded. "Don't you think I was right to ask them to come back? They are, after all, Russian citizens."

"I think you were right," she replied, "with one exception."

"One exception?" he repeated.

"Nicholas Imanoff. If you allow him to return I don't think I should have him in the army. You know what the Russian peasant soldier is. Communism is a meaningless cry to him, although he may shout for it if he is bidden. God and the Czar are still in his blood."

"YOU are giving me advice against your own people!" he exclaimed suddenly.

The faintest tinge of color stole for a moment under the creamy pallor of her cheeks. The same idea had flashed in upon her.

"I am tired of plots and rebellions," she explained. "Changes of government should be worked out by the will of the people. If the people call for a Czar—well, there is Nicholas. But if he is once in the army there will be plots. It isn't for our own good. I should like to see the monarchy reëstablished. but I should like to see it reestablished by orthodox means."

"You tell me that Alexandrina of Kossas is your patroness," he said. "Does that mean that you too are an aristocrat?"

"By inclination," she confessed. "You must remember that it is not only the aristocracy who would support monarchy. I am one of those who consider it the sanest form of government. Would you like me to do anything with this proclamation?"

He took the sheets from her and glanced through them, made a few alterations in pencil, and laid them down again. Afterward he resumed his restless perambulation of the room. She leaned back in her chair and waited. Samara was evidently disturbed. Occasionally he muttered to himself. Once he stood for quite five minutes gazing out of the window, down into the windy, sunlit streets.

"I am sailing this afternoon, Miss Borans," he announced, suddenly turning round. "My people are all emphatic and they are right. There is danger here and trouble to face at home."

She did not attempt to conceal her interest.

"I read your interview in the New York *Comet*, this morning," she said, "but after all it told us very little. As the general was saying last night, you are still outside the Pact of Nations. You can demobilize the whole of these first million men and still remain, on paper at any rate, the greatest military power in Europe."

"I could," he assented. "But that is not my intention. I want my Russian people back on the land instead of behind the gun, and I'm going to have them there. That's all I can say. Later on I have a scheme of my own for a citizen army—the only sort of army any country ought to have. . . . Miss Borans, will you go back to Russia with me?"

"Will I do what?" she asked, looking at him intently.

"Precisely what I have asked," he persisted. "What relatives have you here?"

"A sort of aunt," she replied, "and a second cousin."

"Good! You work now for the management of this hotel. Work for me instead. I need a secretary like you. If your friends accept my offer you'll have company over there. You won't clash with Andrew. He has his own line of work."

She shook her head.

"I could not work for you, Mr. Samara," she said.

"Why not?" he demanded roughly. "You are a Russian patriot. So am I."

"Our ideas of patriotism might not be the same," she pointed out. "If there were a movement in favor of the reëstablishment of the monarchy in Russia, for instance, I should join it."

"Join it and welcome," he answered. "I'm not at all sure that you would, though, if you were on the spot. Russia today is leaping onward toward prosperity. I can prove that to you. What do you want a monarchy back for? Not for the sake of the Russian people. They'd be no better off. Who are you for, Miss Borans—the people or one particular class?"

"That one particular class is a section of the people," she reminded him.

"An infinitesimal one," he urged. "Majorities count. You must work for the good of the greatest number."

"All the same," she said, "I am not disposed to be your secretary."

His face darkened almost into a scowl.

"Don't be absurd!" he protested angrily. "It's a good offer. You can name your own salary in reason. You would be able to live in your native country instead of being an exile."

She shook her head.

"It is an impossibility," she assured him.

He glared at her for a moment furiously. Then, without further reference to it, he abandoned the subject.

"Take down these letters," he directed. "Take copies but be sure you give them to me."

"I am quite ready," she murmured.

HE DICTATED for an hour. When he had finished, he read the letters she handed him, with almost meticulous care, signed them and watched her as she placed them in their envelopes. Then he took the copies, looked them through and locked them up in a dispatch box.

"How is Mr. Andrew Kroupi this morning?" she inquired.

"Better," he answered shortly. "He will not be able to travel with me, though. It is most annoying."

She glanced at the clock.

"What time does your boat sail?" she asked.

"Eight o'clock," he told her, "but I am going on board at six. It seems that, although the magistrate discharged our friend of yesterday morning, a hint or two of what he was after got about. I'm practically being smuggled out of the country."

"You have appointments at one o'clock and three," she reminded him. "Is there anything more that I can do for you before I go?"

"There is only one thing you could do for me, and you won't do it," he growled. "I'm not a woman's man and I never learned how to talk to them, but you're the sort of human being it does one good to work with. I believe in you. You could help me."

"There are many others who could do that," she assured him.

"I don't meet them," he answered. "My biographers have written a lot of nonsense about me. Because I have swept clean the roads of life and driven the masses along the appointed way, they talk about my magnetism, my intense sympathy with human beings. It's all rubbish! I have no sympathy. Men and women are mostly puppets to me and life is a chessboard. If I could find some one who would teach me tolerance, some one whom I could trust, for whom I could feel human things, I could accomplish greater deeds than I have ever accomlpished yet. There are times when I am frightened at my own materialism. I have thought all my life universally, in composite blocks. The world is becoming like a doll's house to me. I have a fancy that you might be able to change this. Will you come and try?"

Again she shook her head.

"It is an impossibility," she repeated.

"That ends it, then!" he pronounced abruptly. . . . "Tell your people to send an account for the typing in to the hotel. The Embassy is arranging to pay my bill after my departure. All the evening papers are announcing that I leave on Saturday. You will consider what I have told you concerning my movements as confidential?"

"I will remember," she promised.

She rose to her feet. He glowered across the room at her.

"Some day," he concluded, "you may see that you've wasted a great opportunity. No woman ever had a greater. You read of me and my work but you don't know. When I crushed Bolshevism, the heart and soul of Russia began to beat again. The work is only begun. You and your little monarchist plots! Why don't you lift your head and see the greater things? You could help."

"I am very sorry," she sighed, as she turned away.

He heard the door close. Then he crossed the room toward the cupboard. Help in his task from any human being seemed to be the one thing in life always denied him.

THEY had all gone at last. Samara was alone in his capacious stateroom with a single companion—Bromley Pride, the bona fide representative of the New York *Comet*. Samara listened to the receding footsteps with a frown. Outside was turmoil. The bugle had just sounded the last call for departing visitors.

"This sort of thing," he declared, "would soon drive me mad."

Bromley Pride smiled tolerantly. He was a large, athletic-looking man, clean-shaven and forcible. In New York he was considered to be an authority on Russian affairs.

"I am afraid these last two hours have seemed rather like an anticlimax," he observed. "All the same, I am convinced that precautions were necessary. The police commissioner sent for me himself this morning and begged me, if I had any influence with you, to persuade you to leave the country without delay. There are all sorts of rumors about."

"They warned me in Washington," Samara acknowledged gloomily, "and of course there was yesterday's little affair."

"Yesterday's little affair," Bromley Pride repeated with emphasis, "was only the beginning. I honestly believe," he went on, "that the Germans, over here at any rate, look upon the proposed demobilization of your armies as an act of absolute treachery to them. You don't read the New York papers, I suppose, but the German-owned ones have passionate articles this morning, denouncing your visit here and attacking your whole policy. Whatever one can find to say against the Germans, they are not cowards. Five years ago you were a little god in Germany. Today you have about forty million enemies."

Samara nodded with darkening expression.

"You're right, of course, Pride," he admitted, "but my progress from the Hotel Weltmore to the boat was more like the passage of one of those hated plutocrats of old through the dangerous part of his capital, than the departure of one who has brought freedom to a great country from the city which has canonized that particular quality. Twenty plain-clothes policemen walking along the Customs shed and me in the middle! A sickening sight!"

"If it had been Saturday instead of today," Pride observed, "the chances are ten to one you'd have had a bomb in the midst of the lot of you."

There was the sound of cheering, a sense of gliding motion, the screaming and panting of tugs. Samara drew a breath of relief.

"Well, thank God we're off!" he exclaimed. "Can I go on deck now and get a breath of fresh air?"

"Not yet," the other begged. "Two detectives from Headquarters are going through the passenger list with the purser now. As soon as they send me word down 'O.K.' you can do what you like. You must remember that you haven't told me much yet, sir. I'm not only a New York journalist, you know—I'm a friend of Russia."

"My mission was a success," Samara declared. "That's all there is to be said about it. My task lies ahead. Forty years ago, Russia—the best part of Russia—was trying to drill the military spirit into Russian peasants. Today I have got to knock it out. The Bolshevists were wise people in their generation. They kept a great army going without the slightest difficulty. The soldiers were fed while the peasants starved. Who wanted to work on the land, without enough to keep body and soul together, when there was good food and wine and beer in the army? They're an obstinate race, our peasants, you know, Pride. I've got the capital now to make them productive units of the nation, at work in the factories and fields, and to pay them good money. It's quite another matter to make them see that it's for their benefit, though. That is where the difficulty may come in."

"You'll do it in the end," Pride prophesied hopefully. "You've achieved greater impossibilities."

"Yes, I shall do it," Samara assented. "I shall do it, if only they'll let me alone. I shall do it if I can keep intrigue out of the Duma and the press and the army. I shall do it if I'm given a fair show."

Pride was gazing out of the porthole at the passing panorama of docks and walls.

"One would pray for you, Samara, if one knew how or to whom. There's a soul in your work—something that reaches out of life—out of the mud of politics and man's ambition. The Jews are the only ones left who really pray. I rather wish you were a Jew, Samara."

"You think that I need faith."

"It isn't that, but you need an inexhaustible stock," was the quiet reply. "You have no one to depend upon but yourself. Russia has not produced a single great statesman yet to stand by your side. You carry on your shoulders a burden so enormous that it makes the hearts of us who watch grow faint. How must it be for yourself?"

Samara was looking into space. They were moving more rapidly now—moving all the time away from New York.

"I AM forty-four years old, Pride," he confided. "I came into this fight when I was nineteen. I have never looked back. I have never relaxed or felt fear, but there has been one moment, and that not so long ago, when I almost weakened—if it is weakening to crave help. I thought I saw something wonderful. It was just the mirage."

There was a knock at the door. A detective entered. He smiled the smile of a man who has accomplished good work.

"Everything O.K. now, sir," he declared. "Mike's got 'em—one from Chicago, one from Washington. They've got the bracelets on and the guns are in Mike's pocket. They had a stateroom nearly opposite to you, too, sir," he added, turning to Samara.

"You think they were really after me?" the latter asked.

The detective laughed confidently. "They were after some one on board, sir, and they had a plan of your stateroom. Not a paper between them, and scarcely any luggage. One's a Russian—a red-hot Bolshevist still, they say, whom we've had under observation for years. The other's a German. They won't trouble you any more, sir. As for the rest of the passengers, I think they're all right. The stewards and the crew, of course, we can't vouch for."

"Should I be running any grave risk," Samara inquired, "if I invited you to visit the smoke-room with me?"

The detective accepted the idea with enthusiasm but ventured upon an amendment.

"I'd try that bell, sir, instead," he suggested, "and a word to the steward." . . .

At last came the clanging of a bell which, this time, brought them to a dead stop. Samara watched his visitors depart: Pride, with his cheerful carriage and buoyant air; the two detectives with their quarry; finally the pilot into his little rowboat on the other side. The great semicircle of lights had flashed out through the windy twilight. The freshness of the sea was a marvelous tonic after the spring lassitude of the town and the overheated rooms. Samara strode the deck with a sense of reawakening life in his veins. These croakers had gone. He was his own man again, free to muse upon his great achievement, to revel in the exhilaration of the voyage. Behind him lay New York—and what else? It was an absurdity, but he was heavy-hearted. . . .

The clamorous dinner bugle left him undisturbed. His anticipations of the coming night, the long roll of the ship, the scent of the sea, and the wind upon his face elated him. And then, in the midst of his long, swinging walk, he came to a sudden standstill. A woman was leaning over the rail. He had passed her several times without heeding her. Now, something in her figure, the poise of her head, startled him with a flood of ridiculous memories. She turned and faced him. For once in his life, he, the man of many words, was speechless.

"You see, I changed my mind," she said, with a quiet smile. "I wish you'd go and see the purser about my stateroom."

THEY dined together half an hour later at the little table in a secluded corner of the saloon which Samara had taken for himself. Catherine was very frank.

"It has been the dream of my life to visit my own country," she confided, "but all the same I had not the faintest idea of accepting your offer. When I got downstairs after leaving you I found Kirdorff waiting for me. You may not realize it, but Colonel Kirdorff is a great schemer."

"You are to spy upon me!" he suggested.

"I rather think that is the idea," she assented. "You little know what you have brought upon yourself by your candor last night. They are all planning to return—even Nicholas. When I told Kirdorff of your offer he thought that I should be mad to decline it. You mustn't be angry with them, Mr. Samara. They have lived away from their country a long time. They are getting old and the idea of intrigue stirs them as nothing else in life could. They are not quite to be ignored, but they are scarcely to be feared."

"And you?" he asked. "Are you going to spy upon me?"

"I may," she admitted. "I shall make you no promises. I want to see what you have made of Russia. I want to travel about there and to talk to those people who understand. Maybe you will convert me. If you do not I shall give you fair warning. In the meantime I hope you will find me plenty of work and pay me enough money to buy some clothes directly we land. These dear friends of mine hurried me off with little more than a handbag."

"How is it that you are so intimate with all these people?" he inquired. "You are one of them, I suppose?"

"Don't ask me," she begged. "Let me remain a mystery. I am a working woman and I am going to be a very good secretary. Isn't that enough? Tell me, do you live in a palace at Moscow, and what will become of me there?"

"I live in a portion of the old palace," he replied. "We call it now 'Government House.' You can have your quarters there, or look after yourself outside—whichever you like. Then you can also have an office in Government Buildings where Andrew does most of his work."

"It sounds delightful!" she declared. "We are impulsive people, you and I! You haven't had any references with me and as for you—well, I know that you are Samara and that is all. I don't even know whether you are married."

He smiled. "I think you do," he said. "In case I am wrong, I will tell you. I am unmarried and I have no women friends. As to references, I asked none from you; you must place a similar trust in me."

She returned his smile understandingly. "I think," she confided, "that I have made up my mind to do that." . . .

Catherine went to her stateroom early and Samara, after a brief visit to the smoking-room, struggled out onto the rain-splashed deck. They were facing the Atlantic now, with a gale blowing, driving the spray in blinding sheets across the ship. He found a comparatively sheltered place where the thunder of the wind was heard rather than felt, and where he could watch the flecks of foam leap into the dazzling light and pass away into the black gulf beyond. He was on his way back, his mission accomplished; the second part of the great struggle of his life begun.

There was never a time when he needed clearer vision, a more detached and concentrated grasp upon the great realities. Courage he had in plenty, even to rashness; his will no one had ever questioned, yet in the midst of his content he was troubled with a queer sense of some indeterminate quality in his thoughts, some disposition to find less than vitally important the great issues of life. His mental balance had been disturbed. Another element had entered into the background of his sensations beside the joy of achievement. He filled his pipe and smoked savagely, staggered down the deck and took a stiff drink at the bar, came out again and crawled even farther toward the bows, until the music of the wind was in his ears like the crack of thunder and the hiss of the sea as the waves were parted by the mighty bow of the ship, like an unearthly scream. There were stars out now, shining here and there through a filmy lacing of clouds; a promise of the moon from behind the jagged pieces of black cloud, these latter so low that it seemed as though the tall mast rising from the top of the sea was almost stabbing into their bosom.

Gusts of rain swept into his face. The seamen who passed him silently were wrapped in oilskins. The singing in his pulses continued, the exhilaration of spirit which he tried in vain to believe came from the knowledge that this journey of his toward which the eyes of the world had been directed, had met with a success which he alone had prophesied. And all the time he knew that there was something else; another problem to be faced; a personal self creeping into life, seeking—nay, insisting upon recognition. It was all fancy, he told himself, born of the winds and the stars and the romance of travel. He suddenly realized upon what a trifle the whole great machinery of his mind had been engaged.

IT WAS not until the middle of the next morning that Gabriel Samara appeared on deck. A long line of semi-somnolent passengers watched him with interest; Catherine, who was sipping some beef tea, expectantly. He did not, however, pause in his promenade, only touched his hat slightly and passed on, his hands thrust into the pockets of his greatcoat, his underlip a little protruding, a general air of unapproachability about him. If there were not actually newspaper men on board, there were men connected with newspapers; and they looked at him wistfully—even followed him at a respectful distance along the deck, seeking an opportunity to venture upon a friendly word. They were doomed, however, to disappointment. Samara, after a restless night, had no desire for the amenities of life.

He climbed to the higher deck where few people were disposed to face the wind, and, assured of a certain measure of solitude there, he leaned against the rail, looking down into the steerage. Again, as on the previous night, he felt the scrutiny of a little company of white-faced, black-eyed shadows of men, with skulking movements and a general air of furtiveness. One of them he watched in particular, with something more than ordinary curiosity. The man looked over his shoulder twice and, although his expression was entirely passive, there was recognition in those stealthy glances. Soon he disappeared behind a ventilator, and Samara, after a few minutes' hesitation, recommenced his promenade. This time, however, it was speedily interrupted. The First Officer, who was descending from the bridge, caught sight of him and waited for his approach at the bottom of the steps.

"Mr. Samara," he said, saluting, "may I have a word with you?"

Samara nodded. "Certainly."

"We are very pleased and proud, of course, to have you as a passenger, sir," the officer went on, "but I wish very much you had followed the example of some other overpopular statesmen who travel with us, and done so incognito."

"My friends arranged my passage," Samara explained. "I came on board, as you know, quite unexpectedly."

"Just so," the other assented. "That would have been all right if they had used a little more discretion. The trouble of it is that we have at least a score of your country-people in the steerage—red-hot Bolshevists, every one of them—who came out here and haven't been allowed to land.

They've been at Ellis Island for some time and now we've orders to take them back to Naples."

"I think I've recognized one or two of them," Samara remarked dryly.

"We are taking every precaution," the officer continued. "Not one of them will be allowed to land until after you have left the ship and we have stationed a guard at each of the communicating passages leading from the steerage aft. At the same time they are crafty fellows. I'd have a care, if I were you, Mr. Samara, and particularly, I'd lock both my doors at night. Yours is rather an exposed suite."

"I am much obliged for the warning," Samara responded. "I don't think that my attitude toward life is exactly that of a fatalist, but so far as regards these repeated attempts upon my person I have grown just a little callous, I'm afraid. Or perhaps it is that I have faith."

"It's a fine thing to have," the other observed gravely, "but some of the greatest men in the world have been struck down by the most utter miscreants. We will do our best to take care of you, sir."

"I am sure you will," was the cordial reply.

The morning wore on. Some of the ship's passengers indulged in sports. Down in the steerage a man who called himself a Hungarian, but who had been christened "Simon the Jew," was doing tricks with knives to the amazement of a little group of spectators. He pinned a piece of paper on the wall and from twenty paces he threw short-bladed, ugly-looking knives into a perfect circle. He threw them into the air and caught them by the handles, three or four at the same time, the sun shining upon the blue steel of their blades. Some of the women turned away. Even the men—and they were used to knives—shivered a little. The man was a magician.

IT WAS afternoon when Catherine saw Samara again on deck. Immediately she called to him.

"I thought," she said, "that I was supposed to be your secretary."

He nodded.

"I had no work for you this morning," he said.

"I did not come simply for a sea voyage," she declared. "May I ask whether there will be work to do this afternoon?"

The gruffness passed from his manner. He looked at her, abstractedly. She was wearing a long jumper of a distinctive shade of green, a cap of the same color, and the wind had brought a becoming touch of pink to her cheeks. Her tone was almost severe, but her lips were already framed for a smile.

"There is a dispatch," he announced, "which I wish to prepare for forwarding to London. We will commence it at three o'clock, if that suits you."

"It suits me very well indeed," she assured him.

They separated without further speech. A few minutes later, as he sat at his corner table from which the other chair had already been removed, he saw her coming toward him. This time there was a distinct frown upon her face.

"I understand," she said, "that you have told the second steward to give me a place somewhere else."

"I thought it would be more agreeable to you," he replied.

"You were entirely wrong," she confided. "I shall sit with you or take my meals on deck."

He rose at once to his feet and summoned a steward. "Kindly relay this table," he directed. "Mademoiselle will share it with me."

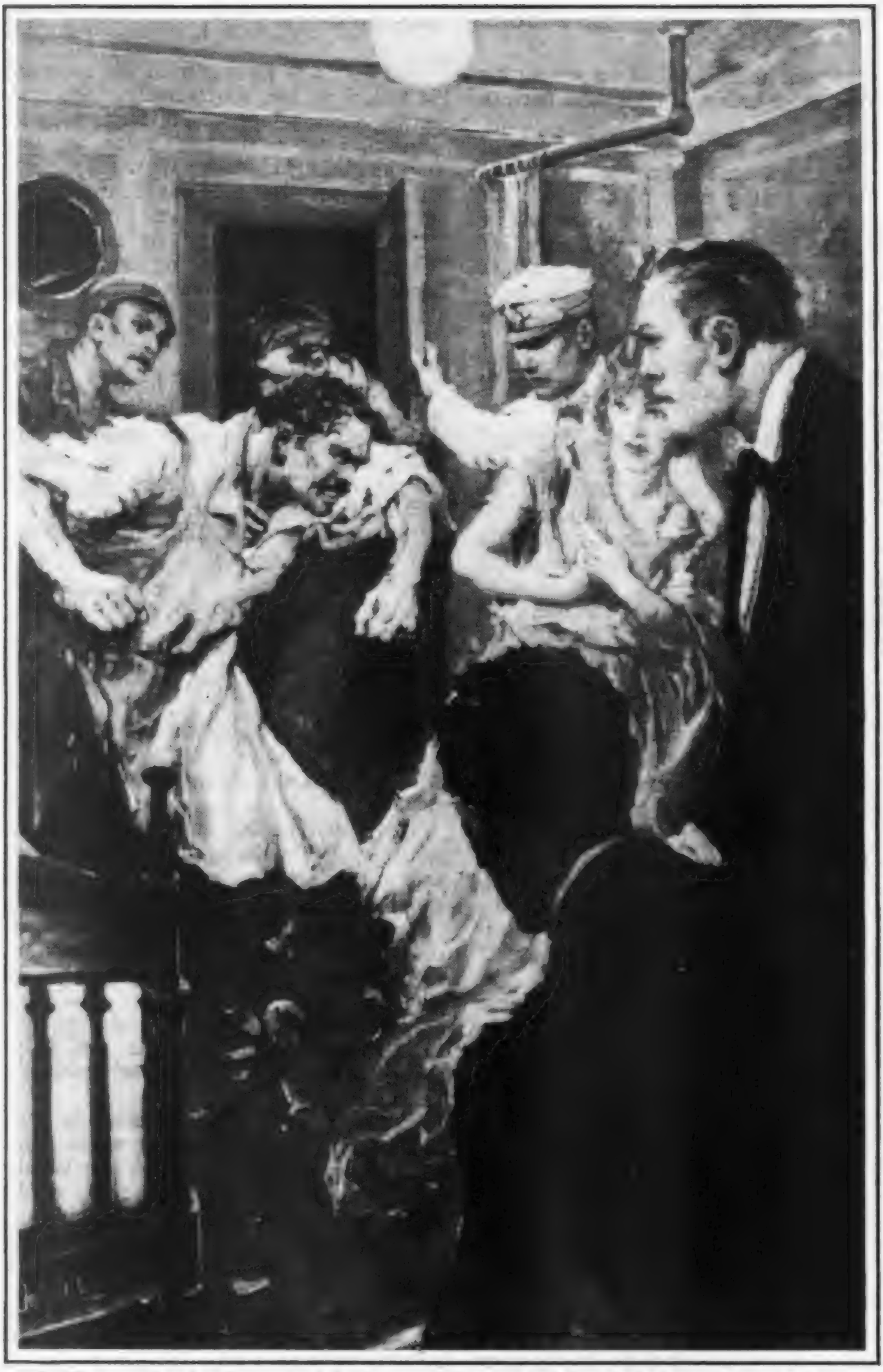
She seated herself and looked at him severely. "Why do you desire to dispense with my society after having made use of so much eloquence to obtain it?" she inquired. "I can assure you that I am a very desirable companion. I can be silent. I can be an eager listener—especially if you talk of Russia—or I can talk nonsense. You have only to name your humor and I can respond to it. But I will not sit with that noisy crowd of fat, curious women and their male belongings."

"You are very welcome here," he conceded, trying to conceal his own satisfaction. "The arrangement I proposed was largely for your sake. I thought that you would like to make acquaintances on board."

She drew herself up and looked at him with a smile, half amused, half haughty. "Why? Acquaintances?"

His retort was prompt. "As a young lady typist from the Bureau of the Weltmore Hotel, taking her first ocean trip—"

"The trick is to you," she interrupted. "I don't like the sarcasm, though. Are you



The man glared at Samara and the desire to kill was mingled with the hate. "I may fail and others may fail," he cried, "but some day one will succeed!"

sure that you still believe in me, Mr. Samara?"

"Ought I to?" he retorted unexpectedly.

"We will waive the question," she decided, after a moment's deliberation.

The second steward came up to pay his respects and to suggest special dishes for dinner that night or luncheon on the morrow. The wine steward followed with news of some old brandy for which Samara had inquired, and his place in turn was taken by the First Officer, who paused for a moment or two on his way out.

"I trust, Mr. Samara," he said, "that you are keeping the matter in mind about which I spoke to you this morning."

"It is scarcely a matter which slips easily from one's memory," was the somewhat grim reply.

"What was he talking about?" Catherine inquired, glancing curiously after the retreating figure.

"A gang of Bolshevists on board, being returned to their native country with thanks. They hate me like poison, of course, every one of them."

She looked troubled. "I am sure I saw some of them," she confided, "when I was looking over into the steerage this morning. Even though they were my own countrypeople, I thought they were horrible."

"There's nothing to fear from such cattle," he said shortly. "You'll have to get used to believing that I am immune from that sort of thing, if you work for me. You have had one dose of it already. As for these fellows, they are no good without organization. They may hate me like poison, but there isn't one of them who would have the courage to risk his life by trying to get rid of me for the sake of his fellows. The Bolshevist hasn't altruism enough for that."

AT THREE o'clock, preceded by a steward carrying her typewriter, Catherine presented herself in the little sitting-room attached to Samara's suite. He was already there, talking to Ivan, or rather the latter was talking and Samara listening. Ivan had apparently worked himself into a state almost of passion. The words came from his lips in a little stream; his fists were clenched. His master pushed him out of the room with a few soothing words.

"Ivan's been down in the steerage," he explained, turning to Catherine with a smile. "Been running amuck with some of the scum there, I expect. He thinks that they'd do me a mischief if they could. So would a hundred thousand more of them, but they don't get the chance."

"I have not quite made up my mind about you yet," she said, as she seated herself at the table. "One thing I am quite sure about, though, I do not wish you to be assassinated while I am around, or indeed, until I am convinced that your work for Russia is over. So far as you have gone I look upon you as the greatest benefactor Russia has ever had. If only you would complete the work!"

"Restore the monarchy?"

"Yes."

"Some day we will argue the matter," he promised. "Now take down the text of my communication to the English Cabinet."

They worked for several hours, Catherine fascinated by the substance of what she wrote, the directness and lucidity with which Samara expressed himself. Sometimes he was at a loss for a word and at her suggestion he supplied her with a Russian one. They drifted now and then into an exchange of remarks in that tongue.

"It seems odd to think that you have never actually been in your own country since you were old enough to remember!" he said abruptly.

"I spent three very strenuous years there, according to my mother," she confided. "My impressions are naturally a little mixed."

He returned to work and dismissed her only when the bugle sounded an hour before dinner time. Afterward he walked outside for a few minutes alone. It was already dusk, quieter than on the previous night but still with a long swell and half a gale blowing on the windward side of the ship. He paced the almost deserted deck once or twice thoughtfully. A whistle sounded from the bridge. Presently the boatswain came up to him and saluted.

"The captain's compliments, sir, and would you speak to him for a moment in his room?"

Samara followed the man to the covered deck and into the captain's quarters. The latter, who had been changing for dinner, came out of his room.

"You will take a cocktail with me, Mr. Samara?" he invited.

"With pleasure."

In a moment there was the sound of the ice clinking in the shaker and the captain's steward appeared with two frosted glasses full of amber liquid.

"YOU mustn't think us a lot of old women, Mr. Samara," the captain begged, as he pushed the cigarettes across, "but I tell you frankly that we're rather nervous about you. We've got a rotten steerage on board, and I'm going to ask you not to walk these decks after dusk. If you care to come up on the bridge while the weather is in any way decent and clear, I shall be delighted. Plenty of exercise there, and all the wind you could want in the world."

Samara smiled faintly. "I have to stick it out in Moscow, you know, and a good many other places which I visit in my own country," he reminded his companion.

"Precisely," the captain agreed. "But permit me to point out a very vital difference. In your own country, for one man who would raise his hand against you there are a million to whom you are something like a god, and any would-be assassin would have to face the fact that he would probably be torn to pieces in a matter of seconds. On board this ship it is a very different matter. My first officer tells me that we've got a score or more of the worst of your country-people on board, who honestly believe in an ignorant way that they've got a grudge against you. It excites them to think that you are so near. They feel that they have a chance of getting at you they wouldn't have on land. I'm one of your great admirers, Mr. Samara, but there's a selfish side to this, too. I should hate to have anything happen on my ship."

"I'll take every care," Samara promised. "Give me a cocktail like that now and then, and I'd almost promise to hide in my stateroom!"

The captain smiled as he divided the remainder.

"It will take a load off our minds if you'll promise to be careful," he said. "We watch those fellows day and night, but they're as slippery as eels. Even now my boatswain tells me there's one of them he can't account for."

"Have they any firearms?"

"Not now. We've taken seven revolvers away from them—not a bad haul for less than a score. In one respect they are not as bad as the dagos—they haven't all a knife up their sleeves."

Samara was escorted back to his quarters by the boatswain. Ivan, who was busy brushing his clothes, was still disturbed and anxious.

"I do not like this ship," he declared, as he shook out his master's coat. "There are evil men upon it."

"Turn on my bath, Ivan. Even evil men without arms in their hands can do no more than think evil thoughts," his master reminded him. . . . "What in hell's name is that?"

There was a strange fugitive glimpse of a white face, pressed against the large, square window which took the place of a porthole; a face which slowly appeared from underneath the frosted lower part and came into sight gradually—a mass of black matted hair, sunken eyes, sunken cheeks, an expression scarcely human. Samara sprang forward, but Ivan held him back with all his giant strength. He pushed his master on one side and hastened to the door.

"It is for me, this, master," he cried.

He was out on the deck in an instant. Samara snatched up a pistol from the drawer of his writing-desk and followed him. There was not a creature in sight. He looked up and down. Ivan crept underneath the boats. The place appeared to be deserted. Samara, with a shrug of his shoulders, returned to his stateroom. Ivan stood still on the deck; a giant figure, his long hair blowing about in the wind, the muscles of his arm taut, rage in his heart.

CATHERINE had just finished a morning's work, which even she had found severe. She leaned back in her chair with a little sigh of exhaustion. Her fingers were stiff, her arms numb, there was a slight dizziness at the back of her head. Outside, too, as though to tantalize her the more, the wind had gone down and the great liner was plowing its level way through a blue sea as smooth as a carpet and bespangled with sunlight. Samara, with the inspiration of his last few sentences still in his brain, was like a man removed altogether from the world. He, too, was looking through that wide-flung porthole, but with the air of one who seeks something beyond the swelling sea and the narrow boundaries of the blue horizon.

Catherine, watching him with curious eyes, forgot for a moment her fatigue. He had indeed the air of a prophet. There was no follower of the cause which lay next to her own heart like this, she reflected sorrowfully. With a momentary pang she thought of Nicholas, and that little circle back in New York, even now making their plans. The recollection failed altogether to exhilarate her.

The sound of the luncheon bugle brought their feet back to the ground. Samara turned swiftly. For the first time that morning, as it seemed to Catherine, he looked at her as though she were a human being.

"You are tired," he exclaimed. "Of course you are tired! I have worked you for three hours without a pause. Ivan!"

The man appeared, silently for all his bulk, and without a moment's delay. His master gave him a rapid order in Russian.

"If I am tired, it is a pleasure to feel so," she assured him. "I feel mentally as you men feel physically when you return from a long day's hunting. Only, if you will give me an hour's rest after luncheon, I shall sleep in the sunshine."

"I shall not work again today," he declared. "I've got rid of much that was in my mind. These thoughts collect in their little cells. One must bring them into shape or sometimes they slip away."

Ivan returned with two glasses full of frosted liquid on a tray. Catherine took one gratefully. Samara tossed his off at a draught.

"Come out into the sunshine for ten minutes before lunch," he invited.

She finished her apéritif and followed him gratefully enough to the deck. They walked up and down once or twice. Then Catherine sank into her steamer chair and, after a moment's hesitation, he seated himself by her side.

"One scarcely needs exercise," she murmured. "The sun and this air are so wonderful and the decks are crowded. Besides, I hate walking. Tell me something, Mr. Samara, if you will. You write openly enough of the second stage in your great struggle for the regeneration of Russia. What is it?"

"Can't you imagine?" he answered a little gloomily. "The escape from our obligations, written and unwritten, to Germany."

"Germany!"

She repeated the word. The full understanding of his announcement eluded her.

"Don't you see," he pointed out, "in the early days of Bolshevist government, Germany obtained almost a strangle-hold upon Russia. The best of her industries were seized upon and worked by Germans. These profiteers made piles of money, but instead of investing it to develop Russia's resources they kept it for themselves, to spend in their own country when they had sucked the thing dry. German capital was used freely enough but not for Russia's ultimate good. The fortunes made went abroad. Russian resources, Russian cheap labor were merely the cat's-paw of German capitalists. The same thing, in a different manner, applied to our armies. It is quite true that German officers and German efficiency have made us a military power far in advance of our requirements, but for what purpose were those armies to be used, do you suppose? Not for Russia's benefit. That is why—"

PRECISELY at that moment an incredible and amazing thing happened—seen first, to Samara's preservation, by Catherine. Scarcely fifteen feet from them was hung a boat, covered by a tight canvas covering. There was hardly a breath of wind and yet Catherine's attention had been attracted by the inexplicable movement of one of the knotted ends of rope which tied it down; an end which disappeared underneath the canvas as though drawn there by invisible fingers.

There was a sudden gap in the folds of the canvas itself, and swiftly following, black tragedy, pregnant with fate; the instantaneous reappearance of that horrible face first seen by Samara through the window of his cabin, and now more than ever like some diabolical jack-in-a-box, the top part of a body, collarless, clad in a gray flannel shirt only, a long skinny arm, gripping in its yellow fingers something that gleamed like silver in the sunlight. It was an affair of seconds.

Catherine never knew the instinct which prompted her. She caught hold of Samara by the neck, and dragged his face against hers. Even as she did so something flashed across those fifteen feet of space like a silver thunderbolt; something that hissed in the air and buried itself in the woodwork where Samara's head had been—buried itself almost to the hilt, and stayed there quivering. There were people walking both ways. They paused in amazement. Samara felt the fiery grip of Catherine's fingers released. He sprang to his feet, just as the misshapen little figure leaped out from the gap in the boat, down on to the deck and turned toward the steerage. Samara, large and loose-limbed though he was, was no less nimble. One long leap—and the man was in his grasp. He was like a rat in the grip of a well-conditioned sporting dog.

Afterward, it seemed to Catherine, sitting there numbed and motionless, that these things could scarcely have happened. A matter of seconds saw the beginning and end of an episode which might have changed the world's history. Samara, shaking with a great anger, held his miserable captive high over his head, shouted one word to him—a Russian word, harsh and uncouth it sounded—strode to the rail, held him for a moment poised, in full sight of half a hundred shivering and paralyzed passengers, and flung him out into the sunlight, far away from the ship's side, into the soft blue bosom of the sea. Even people who had not seen heard the splash and ran to the side of the boat. Samara leaned with the others over the rail. He became suddenly a spectator. Behind him, embedded three inches deep in the woodwork, the knife was still quivering, the sunshine reflected from it like gleams of lightning.

Pandemonium followed, but pandemonium through which ran a thread of order. There was the clanging of the gong from the captain's bridge, the sudden shock of reversed engines, a boat in the sea, almost before people realized its lowering—a boat which seemed to be left far behind as the liner drifted on with her own momentum. A hundred glasses watched it. A hoarse murmur ran all down the line of anxious passengers. Samara felt a hand as cold as ice clutch his. Catherine was standing by his side.

"Have they picked him up?" she asked.

He nodded. "These fellows have the lives of cats," he observed resignedly. "I quite thought that I had broken his neck when I threw him over."

A little crowd had gathered round the sinister-looking knife; others watched the return of the boat with the half-drowned man. In the background people gazed with awe and wonder at Samara—a man who had escaped death by a miracle, and the taking of life by a second one. He was momentarily engaged in tying a handkerchief round his right hand, from which a few drops of blood were falling.

"The fellow tried to bite me when I got hold of his neck," he explained. "I shall go and see the doctor. Any one who touches such carrion needs disinfectants."

People made way for him right and left. The sight of that amazing retaliation of his had imbued him with a grotesque, yet heroic air. It was like a deed from a book of the Sagas. Then into that blazing atmosphere of tragedy there intervened a readjusting note. With puffed-out cheeks and earnest manner a pallid young man produced from a shining bugle the call for luncheon. Untoward and unexpected events are coldly looked upon on board ship. Routine and discipline are paramount. When Samara returned from the doctor's room with his hand neatly bandaged he found most of the passengers, including Catherine, already seated at luncheon.

THE knife-thrower brooded, so far as his narrow mind allowed him, in irons, for the remainder of the voyage, without even the solace of a word from his cowed companions. Samara, with Catherine always at hand to help, worked for several hours each morning, preparing a detailed report of his proceedings in New York. The other passengers loafed and idled and flirted their time away, very much in the usual fashion. Three uneventful days brought peace of mind to the captain and to the first officer.

"Am I a good secretary?" Catherine asked one evening at the completion of a long day's work.

"The best I ever had," he admitted promptly. "All the same, I am not so sure after all that we shall be able to work together for very long."

Her eyebrows were slightly raised. "It should not be for you to say that," she protested. "If I am useful here, why should not I be equally so in Moscow? Andrew

Kroupki, you tell me, will not be able to leave New York for more than a month."

"That is true."

"There is some one else in Moscow, perhaps?" she persisted.

"There is no one else," he assured her. "I have never had a woman secretary."

"Some one in your household would object to my presence?"

He frowned irritably. "There is no woman whatever in my household," he said, "except an old housekeeper who was my nurse when I was a boy. It is not that. The bald truth is that you are not the sort of secretary for a man like myself."

"Because of our political lack of sympathy?" she asked. "I can't help being a monarchist, but as against that you have done Russia a magnificent service by freeing her from Bolshevism. I could never forget that."

"It is not a matter of politics at all," he confessed. "Can't you realize that I dislike having women around me as women? I prefer to keep an unbiased mind. Women belong to the arts and graces of life. They have no place in our serious moments and enterprises."

She looked at him with gentle pity. "Dear Mr. Samara," she said, "it is terrible to hear a man of intelligence like you talk such absolute nonsense. You are looking out on life with one eye shut."

"No great man was ever cumbered with women-kind," he declared. "Those who were, fell."

"If you quote Mark Antony and Napoleon to me I shall shriek," she threatened. "I wish we were entirely of the same way of thinking in other matters. I would soon convert you as to this."

"You should accept my obduracy as a compliment," he said. "If association with you had not its effect upon me I should automatically forget your sex."

"I should never let you," she assured him.

They were promenading the deck together. It was during the hour before dinner and they climbed to the boat deck and walked on the windward side to avoid the crowd. Here they were almost alone.

"My mind this afternoon," Catherine confided, "has, in intervals of work, been engrossed by thoughts of my own future. When do we reach Monte Carlo?"

"Next Thursday," he replied.

"How long do we stay there?" she inquired.

"At least a week," he answered. "One of my ministers is coming from Moscow to meet me, and there will be an emissary from a foreign country waiting for me."

"And after that?"

"We shall go to Moscow via Naples and Budapest. So far as you are concerned when we arrive there, you will naturally be your own mistress. I hope, however, that you will continue to help me, at any rate until Andrew returns. I do not like to speak of money in connection with such services as you have rendered me, but I shall of course see that financially you are unembarrassed."

"Thank you," she said. "In any case I quite intend to come to Moscow with you."

He was silent, for a cause which, had she known it, would have flattered her.

"When you asked me to come with you and I, by the by, refused," she continued, "I knew nothing about Monte Carlo. I took it for granted that I should be taken direct to Moscow."

"You are disappointed?"

"Not I," she laughed. "What girl in the world would be disappointed at the chance of seeing Monte Carlo for the first time in her life! All the same, I am looking forward very much indeed to returning to my own country. Thanks to you, my friends are coming. The grand duchess has offered me a home, and I have no doubt that Nicholas would give me a post as his secretary if I asked him. Czars have to have secretaries, I suppose."

"NICHOLAS IMANOFF will never be Czar," he told her grimly. "I haven't saved Russia from the Bolshevists to hand it back to one of his breed."

"Really!" she murmured. "Well, Nicholas quite thinks he is going to be. He'd look rather wonderful, wouldn't he, in white uniform and a crown?"

"For an exceedingly sensible young woman, you talk a lot of nonsense," he said.

"When I'm in the mood," she confided, "no one can stop me. Still, if you don't press me to remain with you after we get to Moscow, I shall always believe that it is because you are afraid of me."

"You will be quite right," he confessed. "I am already."

She laughed softly and turned to the captain, whom they had just encountered, and who had paused with his hand to his cap.

"Such a confession, captain!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Samara here, who fears no cutthroat, laughs at bullets, and despises bombs, is afraid of me."

"I do not wonder," was the prompt reply. "It is his peace of mind which is in danger."

"It may be that," she reflected. "It is at any rate a flattering thought."

"What are we to do with your Russian lunatic?" the captain inquired, turning to Samara.

The latter shrugged his shoulders. "What do I care? Keep him in irons until I have left the ship, and then, whatever you will. You'd much better have left him where I sent him."

The captain smiled. "Sometimes," he admitted, "I think I agree that the ways of a few hundred years ago were the better."

He passed on and Samara and his companion continued their walk.

"I have quite made up my mind as to my future," Catherine declared. "I wish to come to Moscow with you, to find apartments in the city pending the arrival of my friends, and to continue my work as your secretary—your junior secretary, of course—until that unfortunate young man in New York recovers. I'm deeply interested in your work. I think there are certain aspects of the life and evolution of my country which you understand better than any other person. Don't send me away from you, please, Mr. Samara. Remember that you are entirely responsible for my coming."

"Why the devil shouldn't I?" he demanded with sudden harshness. "You'll leave me as soon as you've learnt all you want to learn. You haven't come at all in the spirit in which I appealed to you to come. You patronize my work. In your heart you despise it."

She contrived to keep by his side without loss of dignity, although he had turned abruptly round and was making for the steps.

"You are very severe all of a sudden," she complained. "Where are you off to in this tremendous haste?"

"To the smoke-room to drink cocktails," he growled. "Beware of me at dinner-time. I may have a few home truths to tell you."

"I shall come with you," she declared. "I need sustenance myself. I wish I did not look so strong. Then you would perhaps be more sympathetic. And as regards those cocktails you are a very fraudulent person. Nothing that you ever drink makes the slightest difference to you."

He laughed hardly. "You are quite right," he admitted. "It doesn't. Still there are times when I like the fire in my veins even when it leads nowhere. Come if you wish to, by all means."

They sat at a corner table in the smoke-room, the object as usual of a great deal of attention, although few people at any time ventured upon more than a respectful salute. When she had finished her apéritif, Catherine rose.

"Go and change now, please," she begged. "I feel that our conversation at dinner-time may be interesting, and I don't want you to sit here and drink more cocktails and be half an hour late."

He rose to his feet but only to let her pass. For a few minutes after she had gone, he remained silent. To the bartender, who paused before him in expectation of a further order, he only shook his head. He told himself that a certain minor crisis in his life was arising, and that he must meet it with a cool brain. He had been conscious of its near approach ever since he had found it easier to remember the cling of Catherine's arm around his neck than the hiss of the knife with its sickening little stab, from which she had saved him. Even now there was a strange and unfamiliar sensation of pleasure as he recalled the clasp of her fingers, the touch of her cheek against his. Folly for any man. Lunacy for him!

YET, at its very outset, the spontaneity of their dinner conversation was ruined by an untoward and ugly episode. The second steward bore down upon them almost as soon as they had taken their places, while Samara was still stroking the green-eyed black cat that came to his chair every evening. He was carrying a silver tureen which he set down upon the table.

"Our under-chef," he confided, "has sent you some Russian borsch soup, with some cream sauce. He was in service once with a Russian family at Nice and learnt something of their cooking."

"Very good if it is really borsch," Catherine remarked. "Am I to have a little?"

The steward smiled reassuringly. "The chef has prepared plenty, madam," he said, as he served it. "I was especially to recommend the sauce."

Samara poured some of the latter a little absently into his plate and held it toward the cat.

"You'll never get rid of him if you give him cream, sir," the man observed, as he turned away.

Samara held out his hand toward Catherine, who was about to commence her dinner.

"Wait," he insisted, "just one moment."

She saw the horror creep into his face and leaned over. The cat lay on its side. Already its eyes were half closed and its limbs were stiffening. The second steward, who had been talking at a table close at hand, came hurrying back.

"Why, what's wrong with the cat, sir?" he exclaimed. "Seems as though he were going to have a fit."

"It is your chef's specially prepared dish that is the matter with the cat," Samara said dryly. "You had better take the rest of it to the doctor."

The man's face was white with horror. "Just a moment, sir," he begged. "I've got to get down to the kitchens first. I wonder whether you'd mind coming with me?"

Samara rose and followed him. Two of the stewards carried out the cat. The chief steward himself came and removed the dishes from the table. There was a babel of conversation. No one knew exactly what had happened. . . .

There was a certain drama in the little scene, although Samara himself was chiefly conscious of a sense of bitter anger. The under-chef in his soiled white clothes and white cap stood, with folded arms, leaning against the wall in the doctor's little consulting room. The doctor was present, also the chief steward and the captain. The latter wasted little time upon the matter.

"Look here," he said to the young man. "You declare that there was nothing harmful in the soup or the sauce you sent up for Mr. Samara."

"It was made as I have always made it," was the sullen reply. "As for the cat, he has fits. It was that and nothing else."

"Very well," the captain continued. "There is the sauce upon the table. Doctor, I dare say you can find a wineglass. You shall drink a wineglassful and we will believe you."

Something of the chef's bravado left him. He watched the sauce poured into a medicine glass which the doctor held out toward him. He took it into his hands and hesitated for a moment. Then he dashed it on to the floor.

"I will not drink it," he declared. "You cannot force me to."

The captain nodded to a sailor who had been waiting outside.

"Put him in irons at once," he ordered.

The man made a sudden spring for the door, but the chief steward caught him by the collar and swung him round. He stood shivering, helpless, but with a look of hate in his eyes. He glared at Samara and the desire to kill was mingled with the hate.

"I may fail and others may fail," he cried, "but some day one will succeed!"

Samara's anger seemed to have passed. He looked at his would-be assassin curiously.

"You are a Russian?" he asked.

"Yes," was the sullen reply.

"Why should you try to kill me—you and these others you speak of? I have worked hard for Russia."

The man spat upon the floor. "You have worked hard for yourself," he snarled. "You are an autocrat, worse than any czar who ever ruled at Peterhof. You're a tyrant, an enemy of Soviet government. That is why we hate you. You stand for the personal; I, and all real Russian patriots, for the republic!"

They led him away. There was a look almost of sadness in Samara's eyes as he turned to leave the cabin. The man was obviously one of an ignorant band of anarchists, ill educated, filled with poisonous doctrines. Yet a gleam of truth sometimes flashed out from unexpected places.

CATHERINE, a morning or so later, leaned over the white rail of the boat deck and watched the blue fires playing about the wires overhead.

"These Marconi people must bless you, Mr. Samara," she observed.

"I think they are more disposed to curse me," he answered. "They've had very little rest for the last twenty-four hours."

She looked at him meditatively. He was, without a doubt, notwithstanding a certain uncouthness and an ungraceful stoop of his broad shoulders, a fine figure of a man. The touch of sunburn acquired during the last few days became him. She approved of the few gray hairs by his ears, the inflexible mouth, his eyes so full of color.

"I never thought I should like a man with blue eyes," she said irrelevantly.

"Do you like me?" he asked.

She laughed ironically. "What a question! Why else should I be here, putting myself, as one of these dear old ladies said the other morning, 'in a most difficult position—private secretary to, and traveling alone with, an unmarried man'? They don't know what a tower of strength you are, do they?"

"I hope," he answered gruffly, "that they have sense enough to realize that I have something else to think about these days besides playing the gallant."

She glanced upward again at those blue fires which seemed ceaseless.

"One loses one's sense of proportion out here at sea," she ruminated. "I am inclined sometimes to forget that you are a very important person. This sort of thing reminds me," she added, pointing to the wires overhead. "How many messages have you received today?"

"I have not counted," he answered. "The last one from England is the most important. For the first time I am inclined to regret that this is not a Southampton boat. I think that I must go to London."

"Delightful!" she murmured. "I can't believe that it compares with New York, but I should like to see it."

"You probably will, then," he assured her. "The Prime Minister has invited me to visit him before I return to Moscow."

"If I were Andrew Kroupki," she remarked suggestively, "you would perhaps go a little further and tell me just what he wants to discuss with you."

"There is no reason why you should not know," he observed, after a moment's hesitation. "Your own common sense can very likely visualize the situation. Naturally what I am doing is of immense interest to England. For the last fifteen years the Russian armies have been the greatest menace to peace in Europe. I have realized that myself, although I have been powerless to act. The rumored demobilization of even a portion of them is an event of the utmost importance both to England and to France."

"I quite understand that," Catherine declared. "But tell me, are any of those messages from Berlin?"

A smile parted his lips, a smile which she was beginning to look for and appreciate. It was like the grin of a boy who sees mischief ahead. He pointed to the blue fires which were still snapping away, high above them.

"Hell!" he confided. "Hell and every kind of fury!"

"What fun!" she murmured. "When do we face the storm?"

"The first breath of it in Monte Carlo," he replied. "Von Hartsen is meeting me there, and I don't think he's exactly carrying the olive branch."

A MESSINGER from the Marconi office brought Samara still another dispatch. He tore open the envelope and read it carefully.

"From the War Office at Moscow," he remarked. "They're deluged with inquiries from Berlin. I must send them a short reply."

He strolled away and climbed the steps into the Marconi room. Catherine descended to the lower deck and made her way to her chair. She had scarcely seated herself before she became aware of a new neighbor on her left-hand side—a middle-aged man with dark beard and mustache, wearing tortoise-shell-rimmed spectacles and a traveling cap with long flaps. At her approach, he laid down the book that he had been reading and glanced cautiously around.

"I have been looking for an opportunity of a word with you, Miss Borans," he said, speaking with a thick guttural accent. "It is very difficult to find you alone."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" she asked coldly.

"My name is Lorenzheim," he told her, "Karl Lorenzheim. I am a friend. Look at this, please."

He handed her a crumpled-up visiting-card of Kirdorff's. On the back were two lines scrawled in pencil:

Lorenzheim is a friend. You can treat him with confidence.

"So you know Colonel Kirdorff," she remarked.

"I am a member of the club of which he is secretary," her new acquaintance confided. "He is a Russian and I am a German, but we are friends. We see things the same way. We are all friends. He desired me to make myself known to you when a safe opportunity occurred."

"YOU are very mysterious," she observed. "What do you mean by a 'safe opportunity'?"

"When Mr. Samara is not around," was the significant reply.

She twisted the card which he had given her in her fingers and returned it to him.

"Mr. Samara is on the upper deck attending to some Marconigrams," she said. "He will be back directly."

"Marconigrams, eh!" Mr. Lorenzheim repeated. "You see them—what?"

"I know what some of them are about," she assented.

He smiled. "You are very cautious," he declared. "I do not blame you, but you can trust me. Mr. Samara," he went on, "is a very great man, but he is a great man for his own people—not for yours or mine."

"I know nothing about his relations with your country," she said. "So far as regards my own friends he has treated them with great generosity."

"Generosity!" Mr. Lorenzheim scoffed. "What is this you say? Generosity, indeed! There is Nicholas Imanoff, who should today be ruler of Russia, selling bonds in New York. Who rules the country in his stead? Samara! Oh, you all say he's a great man because he drove out the Bolshevists. I tell you that the Bolshevists committed suicide with their follies and excesses. If Samara had not dealt them their death blow, Russia would have reverted to a monarchy fifteen years ago."

"That may be," she replied. "I still say that Samara has acted generously in summoning my friends back to Russia."

Mr. Lorenzheim took off his spectacles and polished them. "We must not quarrel, you and I," he said tolerantly. "You call it generosity. I call it folly. Never mind! I have been looking for you to ask you a question. What you tell me is as though you told it to Kirdorff himself. We want to know whether Samara has any idea of tampering with the second army, and whether his messages from Moscow have spoken of any disaffection among the soldiers themselves."

Catherine moved a little uneasily in her chair. She was suddenly conscious of a sense of immense repugnance to this intruder, to his message and all its suggestions. It was with almost a feeling of horror that she realized how entirely it was taken for granted that she was occupying her present position under false pretenses, that she was in reality a spy upon the man for whom she was supposed to be working. Her tone when she spoke lacked all enthusiasm.

"There is nothing definite at present which I can impart to you," she declared.

He turned and looked at her through his bespectacled eyes.

"You do not doubt my credentials?" he asked. "Kirdorff has known me for many years."

"It has not occurred to me to doubt anything that you have said," she replied. "I am not used, however, to having my new occupation taken so much for granted."

"Occupation?" he repeated, mystified.

"As a spy."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Those who toil for great causes," he said, "must stoop sometimes to displeasing methods. Pardon if I return to my book. We speak again together. Mr. Samara approaches."

Samara carried more dispatches in his hand. He paused in front of Catherine's chair.

"Come and walk with me," he invited a little abruptly. "I have something to say to you."

She rose at once and he led the way to a sheltered corner aft where there were usually some empty chairs. He ensconced her in one and remained himself standing beside her.

"We shall land in three days," he announced. "It is essential that after my meeting with von Hartsen I should go at once to Moscow, or remain in Monte Carlo for a few days. There is, however, this invitation from the Prime Minister of England, to be dealt with. Will you undertake a commission there for me?"

They were nearing the Straits and she looked thoughtfully out across the sea to the bare rocky coast of North Africa. Samara watched her with impatience.

"I wonder whether you realize," she said at last, "that it is less than a fortnight since I came to your rooms from the Hotel Weltmore Typewriting Bureau to work for you?"

"Twenty-seven hours less than a fortnight," he assented. "What of it?"

"You have already entrusted me with a great many of your secrets," she reminded him, "and the little you know of me is not altogether, from your point of view, a recommendation. I belong, in fact, to a political party opposed to your views and your system of government. Don't you think that you are placing a little too much trust in me?"

"I do not," he answered, "or I should not ask you to undertake this mission to London. You are a patriot and even though your sympathies are still engrossed in a romantic but hopelessly outdated cause, you admit that I have done a great work for Russia. Why should I not trust you? When I find you embroiled in a monarchist plot it will be time enough for me to send you to a fortress."

"Would you ever have the heart to do that?" she whispered, looking at him with a provocative gleam in her eyes.

"Heart!" he repeated gruffly. "I have no heart. If you betrayed my confidence, I should see that you had what you deserved."

"Nevertheless," she persisted, with a return to her more serious manner, "I think you are disposed to put too much trust in me."

He looked down at her with the momentary irritation of an elder toward a child.

"Neither a guarantee of secrecy," he declared, "nor absolute immunity from theft, can ever be purchased or built up with bolts and bars. Trust, considered and calculated trust, is safety. To know where to bestow it is, I admit, a form of genius. If I seem to you flamboyantly trustful, it is your judgment that is wrong. I believe in your sense of honor and my own instinct. Kindly let that end the discussion."

THAT night they were anchored in the Bay of Gibraltar, in the shadow of the great Rock, ablaze with its thousand pinpricks of fire. Samara was summoned from the dinner table to receive a call from the governor, who had come aboard in his launch, and Catherine leaned for some time over the side of the ship, watching the little boats below with their wares of fruit and flowers and tinsel merchandise. Presently room was made at the foot of the gangway for the governor's launch, and he and Samara stood for a moment or two at the top of the steps talking. Then the former took his leave and soon after Samara found his way to her side.

"Come on the upper deck," he invited. "These people below are so noisy."

She obeyed at once. They sat on one of the fixed seats with their backs to the fortress, as far removed as possible from the hubbub of the extemporized market. She asked him a question about the governor.

"A pleasant man and very friendly," he told her. "Naturally as an old soldier he was interested in the demobilization of our armies. He was very anxious for me to go and spend the night at Government House."

"Why didn't you?" she asked idly.

He made some casual answer, but his sudden realization of the truth was a shock to him. A celebrated French traveler was staying there whom he was anxious to meet, and an English writer whose works had interested him; yet the desire not to leave the ship was paramount. He frowned as he looked meditatively across the bay to the lights of Algeciras.

"I shall go to London if you wish me to," she announced abruptly.

"I imagined you would," he replied. "Your mission of course will be more personal than official, but at the same time I shall entrust you with a message to the Prime Minister which I do not care to send through our own representatives there. We have three days more to talk of that, though."

"I wish it were longer," she confessed.

"You do not regret having come, then?" he asked.

"I have never regretted it for an instant," she assured him. "All the same, to me this voyage seems to grow in unreality every day. I can't really believe that I have left New York behind, that we are here in European waters and that I am working day by day with you. It doesn't seem part of my life—like something detached, something which might have happened but didn't."

She turned to catch a glimpse of an expression in his face which startled her. There had been moments lately when she had almost felt terror of him.

"It has been an unusual experience for me," he admitted. "I have never worked with a woman before."

She laughed, suddenly. His way of alluding to their association appealed to her sense of humor as she thought of the long nights they had sat on deck, with the rushing of the wind around, the leaning stars and the long golden pathway to the moon; of their long talks and their long silences. More than once tragedy, passing by, had lifted them out of the world of commonplace things and forced them into a position of more than ordinary intimacy. Was it his sense of honor, of guardianship, she wondered, which had kept him always so aloof, or was it that she herself made no appeal to him? She had remained all the time perfectly natural, had made no effort at any artificial reserve. Vaguely she found herself somewhat resenting his attitude. Most of the men on board had, in their own way, directly or indirectly, done their best to intimate the fact that they found her attractive. Samara had never once even looked at her as though he recognized the desirability which made other men hang round her chair and seek her company. An irresistible longing to evoke a more personal note in him assailed her.

"You find it as easy to work with me as with a man?" she asked.

"I have never noticed the difference," he answered calmly. "You are very efficient."

Her lips relaxed and she smiled at him.

"I am a great deal nicer to look at than your other secretary," she said reflectively. "I do you more credit, too."

"In what way?"

"Poor Andrew Kroupki!" she murmured. "He looks half-starved and very miserable. I, on the other hand, look well fed and content. No one would ever suspect you of ill-treating me."

"One does not choose a secretary for his personal appearance," he remarked.

"Some men do, I am afraid," she replied.

SAMARA looked at her and she was not quite so sure of herself. In the darkness his face seemed more dominant than ever, his mouth almost cruel in its strength. Only his eyes were a little disturbing.

"You don't imagine that that sort of thing would have any appeal to me?" he asked scornfully.

"I wondered what does appeal to you," she sighed. "Evidently I don't."

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders. "How does a woman generally know such things?" she retorted.

She had an indefinable sense of disaster—or triumph. She suddenly felt the clasp of his arm around her waist, the touch of his fingers upon her hair and cheek. She had not before doubted her ability to meet any situation which might arise, but in this moment of trial she failed utterly and helplessly. She was suddenly weak in all her limbs. She made not the slightest resistance to a thing which had never yet happened to her, which she had never, for a moment, contemplated. His eyes seemed like fires, but softer—softer every moment. The cruel lines of his mouth, too, seemed to have relaxed. His lips touched hers firmly yet softly, lingered there while passion grew. She was almost swooning in his arms. . . .

He released her quite gently yet with a certain abruptness. He rose and stood looking down at her, massive, unemotional, yet with some subtle air of the conqueror. She returned his gaze, helpless, her hands gripping the back of the seat. A corner of the moon showing from behind a jagged mass of cloud faintly illuminated her face. Her lips were still quivering. It was not for her to know that a new light in her eyes had suddenly made her more beautiful than ever before.

"Mr. Samara!" she gasped.

"I am sorry," he answered, "but I am also glad!"

She heard his receding footsteps along the deck, saw him knock at the door of the captain's quarters, enter and disappear. Below, there was still the subdued hubbub of the hucksters. In a more distant boat a swarthy Spanish woman was singing a love song to the music of a guitar.

The conqueror of the Bolsheviki visits Monte Carlo, and faces his most menacing foes—in the next instalment of "The Great Samara," in May EVERYBODY'S out April 15.

His Birthday

Little Kindness in Life Had He Found Among His Fellow Creatures; and Now, Far from His Own People, Death Menaced This Successful Yet Disapponted Man Before His Time

By Maryse Rutledge

HE LAY there, a big helpless man in a red flannel dressing gown, glowering at the room full of flowers. He had insisted on that open window by his bed. It was for such small victories that he plotted and planned, and when they were denied him he let out his diminished roar, still commanding obedience.

What comfort could his pride take today? Every phase of his earlier career was clear as type on a page; every advance, every sacrifice, every triumph filed in his mind, adding to the bulk of his achievement up to a certain point. That had been, he had thought then, the point of satiety where, wearied of the ease with which he could beat the other big fellows and increase his fortune, he had thrown over the too familiar game. When a man worked as he had worked until he was fifty, and lost his wife, and was childless, what was there left? He had wanted to travel, to educate himself, to learn the Continental art of play and something, too, of the other arts. Well, he had followed it through, wilfully cutting himself off from his friends and his country. And now it was the end, and he none the wiser.

The keen smells of November came to him, stirring the curtains. Smells that whipped up in him an almost intolerable longing to rise and be off again on his quest: to be gone from his used body and to rove, unrestricted, where he willed. And his heart turned homeward.

He looked out upon a brilliant bit of foliage. For a moment he imagined it some splendid tree—say, in Maine, where at this season he might have been camping on the shores of the lake he could never forget. The sounds of small waves, the rustle of wind in the birches, the crackle of camp-fires were with him still. But there was always now mingled among them the smooth box-laden air of Versailles, the old air haunted by the past. And he had no place in that past. No obscure tingle of nerves associated him with it, as, for instance, the quiver he had always felt when he visited the little town near Chicago where the family house still stood: an empty house gently dying.

Yet his first contact with the treasures of Europe had given him a thrill. He had left not a nook of a château or cathedral unexplored, not a famous picture or a tapestry unseen. Those old fellows knew what they were doing. They had built and painted and planted as solidly in their way as he in his. And they had more to show for it. There was Versailles now, royally unsubdued, with the dreaming grandeur of its façade, the flash of its fountains and statues, the symmetrical pattern of terrace and avenues, its trees growing ever more ancient. He was safely hidden here. He could not have borne the dismay or pity of old friends.

The waiter was setting the table for a luncheon party of six. His guests could stand, he supposed, eating in a sick man's room on his birthday. At Cyril's suggestion, he had sent his motor in to Paris to fetch them. He paid Cyril to make such suggestions, and Cyril was never backward. It was hard enough, Cyril probably realized, to coax any one from town to be with an old paralyzed man on his birthday.

He had few illusions as to this young man's friends. But it rather grimly amused him to watch them making up to him for Cyril's sake. Well, Cyril would lose nothing in the end for having sacrificed several years of his gay reckless life in catering to the needs and entertainment of a cranky invalid.

Meanwhile, he had his bit of fun keeping them all in dancing attendance to his whims—Cyril, Dr. Wells, Jean Paul. Dare say they often wondered how much longer he could hold on. He wasn't so sure that it had been only one of his jokes to have announced as his birthday present to them, his intention on the following day of getting out. He was sick enough of watching them watch him to make that deliberate engagement with himself. Was it his imagination that there had been, after their loud and inevitable protestations, a slightly accelerated eagerness to please? Even the waiter who was setting the table seemed to be expecting the larger tip which he might reasonably hope for on the celebration of a last birthday. And early that morning the manager of the hotel had sent up a dozen magnificent chrysanthemums which could be taken as a premature floral tribute to one of his best clients who would shortly be on his way to a less expensive house.

WHAT clumsy creatures waiters were! "Here, you, straighten those glasses," he snarled. "And say! Where are those gardenias and carnations I ordered?" Of course the fool didn't know. Cyril's job, anyway. Cyril must be writing the place cards now. Confound these pillows! Whichever way he lay, he was uncomfortable. Jean Paul ought to be here to turn him around.

"Tell that man of mine I want him."

But it was Cyril who came in, Cyril sleek and bright with hands of a woman and his infernally charming smile.

"Here, let me, Mr. Dunlap. That better? Jean Paul went to speak to the chef. We want everything just right, you know."

"What do I care?" he grumbled. "Damn lot of slops is all I get out of this feast."

You couldn't ruffle Cyril any more than you could find a wrinkle in the immaculate set of his morning coat. "Here's something Miss Carney sent you," he said in that pleasant English voice of his, and handed over a package done up in tissue paper and blue ribbon. "She was so sorry she couldn't come today."

"I never told you to ask her," he grunted, but his fingers trembled a little as he fussed with the ribbon. Say, that was cute! A small porcelain figure of a girl in a bathing suit. Miss Carney, the wicked old thing, knew what would please him. On his last birthday she had sent him all the way to Monte Carlo a French doll with an inviting and naughty eye.

"These are from Devaux's wife." Cyril was briskly out and in the room again with a bunch of pink roses. Wired in the middle of them was a little American flag.

Now that was mighty nice of her! But, darn it all, why did these people who meant nothing to him give him presents? The wife of the chauffeur, too. And Devaux had only been with him six months.

"I'll take that flag." He laid it beside him on the bed. It made a gallant spot of color.

He wished old Jim Riley would walk in now. What would Jim think of Cyril and the others? Not very hard to guess what he'd think. But then Jim never did like these foreigners. The last time he had met Jim was four years ago in Paris, and they had made a night of it. Lord, how Jim laid it on about his giving up his profession and all! "You, John P., one of the best corporation lawyers in the States messing around here, running to seed! You make me sick." Just as well Jim couldn't see him now.

"I'm going to get the gardenias and carnations. They must have arrived." Cyril stood at the foot of the bed. He looked just a little bit pinched and tired. The strain of weeks was beginning to tell. He wasn't quite the same debonair young man as he had been when he consented to play companion and clown to a grouchy old man. Well, what of it? You couldn't catch a live American boy doing this sort of thing. No, sir! If there had been a John P., Junior—

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Mr. Dunlap?" Cyril waited near the door.

"Where's Jean Paul? I told him to put out the cigars and cigarettes." He was feeling tired, himself, and the party hadn't even started. Why had he kept up this fool habit which first his mother and then his wife, Louisa, had passed on to him, of celebrating his birthday?

"Jean Paul went to speak to the chef," Cyril patiently repeated. "Ah, here he is!"

"A thousand pardons, monsieur." Jean Paul, looking more than ever like a small flustered gray animal, hurried in. "My wife, she came from Paris to see me, not knowing it was Monsieur's birthday. She presents all her best wishes—"

"I thought you were with the chef," he said dryly. They needn't think he missed the glance exchanged between them. Natural for one to protect the other against his temper. "Now you're here, you can get out the cigars and cigarettes. Put 'em on the mantelpiece. And, for heaven's sake, get rid of some of these flowers! I want to breathe." He softened his tone for, after all, Jean Paul didn't often receive visits from his wife.

He lay quietly watching the two men bustle about: Cyril putting last little touches of perfection to the table as a careful host would; laying white carnations for the men, gardenias for the women at each plate; Jean Paul thinning out the vases of flowers. Not a soul coming really cared. A dull sadness and a heaviness of spirit darkened his day. He saw himself in the mirror opposite, his white hair brushed back, a deceptive flush of health in his cheeks. He didn't look sick.

"Here they are." Cyril's mechanical cheerfulness clicked into genuine animation. He disappeared into the adjoining room, carefully closing the door. But not before he had brightly promised, "I'll telephone up to Dr. Wells's room right away, Mr. Dunlap."

Yes, he would close the door to muffle those first indiscreet inquiries and careless little laughs, and the tinkle of ice in the cocktail shaker. He was very tactful, was Cyril.

JEAN PAUL'S narrow clean-shaven face with all its wrinkles, his anxious little eyes were quite near as he bent over for a final adjustment of the pillows. Good man, Jean Paul.

"So your wife has come to see you today?"

"But yes, monsieur. She didn't know—"

"That's all right. She must be lonely in Paris without you."

"Yes, monsieur."

If only the man would speak up now and then! "Leave those." He wanted his porcelain figure of the girl, and the flag which Jean Paul, in his rage of order, was about to put away.

"Never mind, Jean Paul. You've been with me three years. I'll see that you're treated right."

And here was Jean Paul standing by the bed, his funny little wrinkled face twisted, his hands twisting. "I thank Monsieur. I should like to tell Monsieur—I am very devoted to him. My wife and I—"

"That's all right," he said again, and his fingers played with his sheet. Decent of Jean Paul. He wasn't just a dummy then earning his high wages—

But the man hadn't finished. "It is like Monsieur Winship. He, too, is all devoted to Monsieur." He seemed to be pleading.

Ah, Cyril was another matter. One never knew with Cyril. "That will do, Jean Paul," he said wearily. Had Cyril perhaps put Jean Paul up to this? There was his mind again suspiciously probing.

He heard the doctor's voice. No door could shut out that loud hearty tone. "Well, Winship, how is our patient since breakfast? Mrs. Glinn, delighted to see you charming as ever. And how is the dear lady?"

They had all forgotten him. A pack of shady hangers-on who would presently eat his food, drink his wines and gabble nonsense at him.

He had only himself to thank for taking what company he could get.

"Many happy returns of the day."

"How well you look!"

They were in the room, gathered around him. He was aware of them as of a flock of tropical birds descending on a shattered old tree—the women, their eyes and lips bright, inquisitive; Dr. Wells's ruddy color flaming, Beresford round and pink, and the dark La Salles, Mrs. Glinn's present attachment. Cyril hadn't dared to tell him that La Salles was coming. He had said a "friend."

"It was sweet of you to have us today of all days." Mrs. Glinn seemed ever about to snuggle. Her large gray eyes followed La Salles as he sauntered over to the window.

He would give Cyril the dickens for inviting the fellow—a namby-pamby stick of licorice distorted in a chronic pose of tango.

"I'm glad you could come," he said to Mrs. Glinn with the grave courtesy which was his shield. Why didn't Cyril start something—start luncheon?

Dr. Wells circled the table, twinkling behind the elegantly perched glasses which bit into his pinkish nose. "We'll have you sitting at your own table this time next year, Mr. Dunlap." He sounded the false jovial note of his profession.

"I hope you won't be my guests where I'm going."

Cyril thought that bad taste. He turned away, stroking his little mustache.

"You mustn't say such things, Mr. Dunlap." Mrs. Beresford, plump and very blonde in her blue serge, wagged a playful finger at him.

He knew a lot more about the Beresfords and their bridge games than Cyril suspected. But then, because he was cooped up in bed and more than half dead, they needn't any of them think that he couldn't see through their pose of fashion. They never would be the real thing. It rather cheered him to know this. It gave him the advantage.

He watched them while they settled around the table, exclaiming over their boutonnières. His stage was set, and they were all performing for his amusement. But he wasn't amused.

The sole was presented for his inspection. The suave smell of it mounted to his nostrils. Yes, the sauce looked all right, the kind he particularly liked, yellow and creamy with écrevisses and moules delicately mixed in.

"Where's that wine man?" His voice sounded fretful.

Mersault, 1904, was poured into every glass but his.

DR. WELLS was something of a connoisseur. He sniffed at the bouquet and called over: "Delicious, Dunlap! Here's to you."

And then, of course, they had to drink to him. And he had to make some kind of grimace back at them. Well, that was over.

"She's got hold of Jacques de Brilles," Mrs. Glinn started chattering. "He never leaves her side."

"I thought it was Olivera." And that bounder, La Salles fitted on his monocle.

Here was the waiter with his birthday portion of slops. Vegetable soup, unseasoned. He eyed it angrily. A hell of a good time he was having!

"We were out of luck. Don held the ace, king and queen, and would you believe it . . ." Mrs. Beresford was confiding her losses to Cyril.

"Take this stuff away." He handed his cup to the hovering Jean Paul.

"May I come and sit with you?" Mrs. Glinn strolled over, her wineglass in her hand. The light caught the amber wine and made it shine. "Can't you have just a sip?"

"I'm afraid not." His smile barely lifted the corners of his white mustache. She was a good-looking woman. How could she stand such a whipper-snapper as La Salles?

"It must be dull for you." Her gray eyes expressed just the right shade of sympathy. "But you're interested in things, aren't you? Cyril tells me you know a lot about art."

"There's my art." He pointed to the figure of the bathing girl.

She laughed as at some witty joke. "How quaint of you!"

Oh, yes, very quaint! He wished she would leave him alone. Her perfume provokingly reached him. Where was her husband—if she had one!

Thank Heaven, here was the pheasant. "Better go back to your luncheon." He didn't sound very gracious.

Her thin red lips curved as she bent to whisper: "You despise us all, don't you? We're not really so bad, though." And lightly she moved back to the table.

Well, what do you know about that? He found himself chuckling. But his eye rather wistfully followed the course of the bird. Lord, it looked good! Those green peas would melt in your mouth. And Château Lafitte, too. Nothing the matter with the luncheon.

"Say, doctor, can't I have a bite of that pheasant?" He knew the answer, but he had to ask.

"Oh, yes, do let him! Here's a wonderful piece." And Mrs. Beresford carried over to him her own untouched plate.

"Surely a bite can't hurt him," Cyril joined in.

And even Beresford stopped eating long

enough to plead: "Have a heart, doctor!"

"Now—now, Mr. Dunlap, you must be good." Dr. Wells's voice was playful but firm.

He wished he hadn't spoken. It was almost as if he had given over a part of his private life to these strangers. He resented their knowing that solid nourishment was forbidden him.

Mrs. Beresford's blue eyes smiled into his. She stood offering her plate as one would sweets to a child.

He felt exasperated. He wanted to create among them discomfort, embarrassment. "What would happen, doctor, if I insisted? Suppose I asked for some of that Château Lafitte, too." His hard blue eyes were fixed now on Wells, who moved uneasily, twirling his glass.

"Why, I—why, it wouldn't do at all, you know. You will have your little joke, Mr. Dunlap. Stop tempting him, Mrs. Beresford."

Cyril's eyes mutely entreated him to put an end to this childish exhibition. It was that look which urged him on. "I believe I'll disobey you, doctor, for once." And he stretched out his hand for the plate. Of course, he never intended to take it, but Mrs. Beresford, looking distressed, backed away.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Mr. Dunlap!" she murmured.

He was certainly stirring them up. They knew him for a determined old man. "I'll have it, I say." He faced them from his bed, a maimed bull who couldn't charge but who could roar.

In the sudden hush, Dr. Wells rose, and there was no more fooling in his voice. "I must forbid it, sir. While you're under my charge—"

Just one more attack, and then he was through. "What would happen if I insisted?" He challenged with his remaining strength. There was still fire enough in his eyes to draw a straight answer.

"Since that operation—suicide. It would be fatal for you, in your condition, to eat solid food. And you know it." Dr. Wells was curt. "Come—come, Mr. Dunlap!"

Hadn't they dinned that into him enough since that damnable operation which, it was true, he himself had insisted on having? Not that there could ever have been any hope. . . .

"I give in." He tried to chuckle, but there was no mirth in him.

There was no fun left in any of them. They silently returned to the lessened pleasure of the pheasant. The salad came on.

He lay back and closed his eyes. What a fool he'd been to expose to them his sorry estate! He heard their voices presently weaving again a pattern of light conversation. Cyril was working hard. Cyril would be angry with him and sulk.

He thought of green grass and blue skies. That golf course near Southampton. He and Jim Riley playing on an early morning. He followed the swing of Jim's short-muscled arms, saw the sunlight on Jim's good old crop of red hair. "That's some drive!" He heard Jim's voice, loud, excited. He drew a deep breath.

WHAT was it now? Why were they clapping? He opened his eyes. Jean Paul stood before him, his face solemn with importance. He was holding out a birthday cake, a huge sugared affair, candles and all. Not enough room for fifty-five candles even on that cake.

Well, well, this certainly was a surprise! Kind of them—very kind. Jean Paul's little eyes blinked. They were all gathered once more, spontaneously, around his bed, drinking again to him. It was something in their faces and their voices which reached below the crust of his suspicion. Their hard sparkle seemed softer as if they were trying to tell him that they had done their best to bring a little joy into the monotony of his days. Why, damn it all, even the La Salles fellow, without his monocle, looked almost human!

It was in the nature of a tribute, he thought, with an odd stirring of his heart, a warmth which ran through him and gave to his smile a singular unaccustomed sweetness.

"Isn't it wonderful?" cried Mrs. Beresford. "I went with Cyril to order it at Colombin's. We brought it out in the car. I was so afraid Don would sit on it."

"Well, well, it's fine!" He tried to lift himself upon his pillows.

Cyril came over with a knife. He wasn't sulky at all. He said: "Lower it, Jean Paul, so that Monsieur Dunlap can reach it easily. There now, Mr. Dunlap, will you cut the first slice?"

The knife went in with a smooth slipping movement. He was proud of that, although Cyril had to help him a little. Louise had always made a special point of birthday cakes. Once she and Jim—

"There you are! Ripping!" said Cyril.

"It's a fine cake." He couldn't find the words. "I want your wife to have a piece, Jean Paul. And Devaux and his wife, too."

Now they were talking again and laughing. And it was quite fun, really, when Mrs. Glinn found the ring and Beresford the thimble. He was almost sorry when Beresford suggested that they had all better be getting back to town. It seemed suddenly to change them back into their hard gleaming selves. He liked them the other way.

"We're due at the Wilkinses' for bridge at four," Beresford reminded his wife, and there was a businesslike light in his eye.

Mrs. Beresford came to stand beside the bed. He noticed that she looked pale and drawn beneath her rouge.

"I envy you, Mr. Dunlap." Her voice was low and bitter.

"Envy me?" His voice had its own bitterness.

"Yes," she said quietly. "What if you do suffer? You've got all the money you want—all the care. You can rest." And then she seemed sorry she had spoken.

"Money!" In spite of himself he glared at her.

"Yes, money." She looked at him, he thought, too intensely. "I'm so tired, Mr. Dunlap. Don won't work. It's hard living the way we do. So empty!" And she sighed. "I hate bridge." And then she caught herself up as if she had felt Cyril, who had edged closer.

The little woman was worried. Too bad. He might suggest later to Cyril that if a few thousand francs could help her—

"I'll come soon again, dear Mr. Dunlap." Mrs. Glinn's eyes were very lovely with that light in them.

"Ever play bridge?" Beresford's round face was friendly. "We might get up a little game some day with Cyril and my wife. Just for the fun of the thing, of course," he added hastily.

They were all so kind, so different, somehow, from what he had imagined, that he wished, with a strange ache, to be alone. He felt a trifle overwhelmed. He didn't even want Cyril.

"Good-by—thank you—good-by." He waited until they were moving toward the door. "Cyril," he called then, "why don't you trot along and stay for dinner in town? I don't need you."

"Oh, I couldn't leave you on your birthday!" The boy actually meant it.

"You do as I tell you." But he didn't sound gruff. "Dr. Wells will be in the hotel—won't you, doctor? Nothing on earth for you to do. I'm going to take a nap."

Cyril still hesitated, glancing at Dr. Wells, who nodded.

Mrs. Glinn would help. He appealed to her. "Make him go with you. Do him good."

She turned in the doorway, flashing him a look of immediate complicity. What a woman!

"Come on, Cyril, and play with me. La Salles has a stupid date. May we keep the car, Mr. Dunlap?" Her amused greedy little mouth set its price.

"Keep anything you like."

"It's most awfully kind of you, Mr. Dunlap." Cyril came back a moment. "I hope everything was all right?" His voice had a wistful note.

There wouldn't, after all, have been any party, without Cyril. There wouldn't have been any young people laughing and talking. There wouldn't have been any birthday cake.

"Thank you, Cyril. Everything was all right, my boy. Run along now. Mrs. Glinn is waiting." The new softness, like a blossoming, was with him.

CYRIL tiptoed from the room, and now it was the doctor's turn. He must have been waiting for a quiet word. His glasses were shiny little windows through which his eyes seemed to be trying to say things. "I'm sorry, Mr. Dunlap, about that—that unfortunate little incident. I had to be firm, you know. I should never have forgiven myself if—"

"If what, doctor?" He looked up from his pillows with a quizzical twinkle. "A day sooner or later—not important, is it?" He was feeling quite happy.

"Not important!" Wells's jolly red face grew redder. He took a few little steps back and forth. He seemed to have forgotten his professional manner. "You've been under my care now for over a year, and I— Confound it all!" he burst out. "I'm not only your doctor. I'm your—I'd like to be your friend. I wish to God I could get you up from that bed a well man. I can't perform miracles. But by the utmost care—the utmost care, I say, Mr. Dunlap—I hope we may have you with us on your next birthday. Mind you, I dare not promise." And, as if he were rather ashamed of his emotion, he turned and marched over to the farthest window.

"God forbid!" He heard his own voice low, unrecognizable. "Another year of this?" He had never spoken this way to Dr. Wells. But there had been a genuine ring of friendship in the man's voice. He wasn't a professional machine, then.

"It's a rotten deal for you." The doctor, as he wheeled around, looked his age.

That queer embarrassment came over him. Here was a very human unsuspected contact, and he couldn't take it. He couldn't. It was perhaps too late. His fault. "All in the game," he murmured. "If you don't mind, doctor, I'm a little tired. I think a nap—"

Dr. Wells took his cue at once. His manner snapped back. "Why, certainly! What am I doing here? I'll be in my room if you need me." His genial smile seemed to linger after he had gone.

The waiter and Jean Paul tiptoed to and fro, removing the table with its fading flowers and empty glasses. The room smelled of perfume, of tobacco.

His longing to be alone increased. "Has your wife gone back yet, Jean Paul?"

"She is leaving on the four o'clock train, monsieur. Is there anything?" Jean Paul was at attention.

"How would you like to go back with her for the night?"

Jean Paul stared at him idiotically. "Oh, but I could not! What would Monsieur do?"

"Oh, but you could!" he mimicked. "Go on. Do what I tell you." He waved his hand as if brushing off a teasing insect. But secretly he was touched. Jean Paul, too. "I won't have you here," he tried to growl. A pillow slipped to the floor, and Jean Paul hastened forward.

The fellow was a nuisance. "Look here, Jean Paul," he wheedled. "Let me do this for you on my birthday. I'm all right. Doctor's within call. You don't get much chance with your wife, you know."

Jean Paul did know. He hesitated, wavered. "I should not, monsieur."

"If you don't, I'll send you packing." He managed a splendid imitation of temper. "Take your choice. Hurry!"

Jean Paul's eyes were actually moist with tears. "Oh, monsieur! Yes, monsieur. I will go then. There is the bell by Monsieur's bed. The new waiter on the floor will be at Monsieur's disposition."

"Yes—yes, have a good time." He had already forgotten Jean Paul when the door softly closed.

HE LAY back with a blessed sense of relief. People were decent, after all. He would have learned that much. It was a great deal to learn. He had been a hard master, and a suspicious one. And all the time—

He looked at the flowers and was grateful. The room was very still. It held him with a gentle indifference. Nothing here belonged to him; the impersonal elegance of furniture and of blended colors on the walls and in rugs was doubtless repeated in every suite of the hotel. Louise would have enjoyed these rooms. How often they had talked of the day when he should retire, and they would be free to travel!

He thought a little of life and death. Then, calmly, as he had hoped they would come when he was alone, memories came drifting. He saw faces, heard voices of friends. He lived over again a few of his more significant victories in the legal world. Again the camp-fires blazed and died away, and the melancholy night song of the loon came over the lake. Once, the sun had fallen most happily on the bronzed head of a pretty stenographer—what was the girl's name? He remembered looking at the lovely high lights of her hair and thinking, "I should have more time to appreciate beautiful things." Had he had enough time, and had his appreciation been fruitful? He thought of the blues and golds of old pictures, the springing silhouette of a cathedral against the sky. Yes, there had been rich moments. Then why—why wasn't the shape of his life more complete now that he, the sculptor, was putting the last touches to his work?

HE MUST have dozed. The knock at the door startled him. And before he quite knew where he was, some one had opened the door. A big man with red hair was breezing across the room.

"My Lord, John P., haven't you got up yet? Forgotten it's your birthday?"

Jim Riley—old Jim—Jim gripping his hand, talking a blue streak. He couldn't believe it. Jim couldn't be here.

Jim was very much here. "Say, man, what's the idea? I've had the devil of a time trailing you. Your bank wouldn't give me your address at first. Had to bully it out of them. And here I find you at five o'clock in the afternoon in bed. Not sick, I hope?" Jim hovered over him, a big clumsy man with a red face suddenly turned anxious.

Jim mustn't know. He must not know. He could never stand pity in Jim's eyes. His hands trembled under the sheet as he looked up at his friend. The shock of seeing him—good old Jim!—seeing Jim once more, brought back with a rush too many poignant things. "Well, Jim—well, well, I'm certainly glad to see you!" he said at last.

But Jim wasn't to be put off. "You're not sick, old man?" And now he did sound worried. "You look a bit peaked. Been hitting it up? They wouldn't tell me anything at the bank."

He was grateful for the discretion there which permitted his quick reply: "No—no. I've got a touch of rheumatism." It wasn't so hard, after all.

"You with rheumatism? Fiddlesticks!" Jim heaved himself down in a chair by the bed. "Get up, and we'll run into town and celebrate."

"Ouch!" The twinge was realistic enough. "Afraid I can't, Jim. Getting to be an old man, you know." His heart was racing. His eyes never left Jim's face. Lord, how he had hungered for it, for the sound of that big voice which thundered now in laughter!

"Getting old, are you? What am I, then? Too much high living, that's what's the matter with you, my boy. Rheumatism, indeed!" And he snorted.

"Have a cigar, Jim. There should be a box on the mantelpiece. Coronas, your favorites."

It was sheer joy to watch Jim move around that room; to watch his precise gesture as he lit his cigar and puffed, his green eyes roving. "Swell place. And say—have a few flowers! Oh, the ladies!" It was the same old roguish wink.

"Tell me about yourself. How's the family?" He hadn't felt so happy in years. His cheeks burned, his eyes were bright.

Jim never could keep still. He wasn't like Cyril, who could sit gracefully for hours smoking those measly Russian cigarettes—Cyril with his poised movements, his low English voice. What luck that he had sent Cyril off!

Jim strolled about, stopping to pat the porcelain figure of the bathing girl. "Naughty—naughty! I should say you were getting old. The family? Fine and dandy! I left the wife in London to run over here and look you up. Not having heard from you for some years, I thought I might find you in jail."

"Only in bed, Jim." He quite enjoyed his little joke.

"See here!" Jim swung around on him. "Haven't you had enough of this fooling with Europe? I'll bet you have, and you're too cussed to admit it. I'm going to bring you to your senses, John P." He let this sink in while he chewed on his cigar. Then he sank down in the chair by the bed again and burst out: "You're comin' home with me. We're sailing on the *Majestic* in a week."

"Oh, no, I'm not!" He tried to smile, but the great longing within him tore at his heart. If he broke down now and told Jim! He must not break down. "I can't go, Jim." It didn't sound very convincing.

"HOLD on, and listen to me." For some time his vigorous friend talked on, ramming in his points with flourishes of his cigar. "They need you, man," he summed up at last. He was red with argument. "There ain't a corporation lawyer over there who can touch you when you get going. Why, think of it! Think of these American Steel people coming to me and asking if I knew where you were. They know you're the one man to win this fight for them, and they want you. Think of it, John P.—" He was out of breath.

He thought of it. His mind, freshly sharpened, grasped the possibilities. A big job, indeed; bigger than any he had ever had. He lay there silently, forgetting even Jim's presence. He was fighting and winning the case. He was fighting—

"Good boy! Forgot your rheumatism, haven't you?" And Jim leaned over to thump him on the shoulder.

Oh, God, he had forgotten for a moment! He clenched his hands. He tried to lift himself in his bed. This was cruel. The truth to Jim now would be all the more cruel to them both. "Can't be done, Jim." He made it sound final.

He may have thought it sounded final. Jim simply stared at him. "*You* say it can't be done? Look here, John P., I don't want to meddle. But no entanglements, I presume?" His eyes grew suggestive of women.

"Nothing like that," he said quickly.

There was a silence. Then: "What kind of a fool are you, John P.?"

He was going down, down in his old friend's estimation. Rather that than pity. "Put your own label on it." He spoke roughly. He felt a little light-headed. It must be with fever. What was his reasoning long ago when he might have refused just such an offer to go on the wild will-o'-the-wisp hunt which had landed him here? It came to him with the glibness of fever.

"There's nothing—nothing any one can offer me now worth my while," he said. That was true. "I'm done, finished, Jim, with that life over there." And that also was true.

He unconsciously reached over and grasped the little flag which had come with the roses. "What do you fellows get out of it?" He crumpled the flag, pleated it, unpleated it with restless fingers. "I could do it," he said. "I could do it. I can do anything." And it was as if cramped arms within unfolded, flung themselves out. "That's the trouble," he said seriously. "I can do it—and it isn't enough. Jim, I went after something." He was leaning, reaching forward now over the bedclothes. "I had to make good. You know? You remember my father squeezed himself dry putting me through college and all?"

Jim nodded, tilting back his chair. He was frowning as he did when he listened intently.

"When you met me thirty years ago, I was a promising youngster, wasn't I, Jim?"

Jim nodded again, waiting.

"I married Louise, and—well, I gave her most everything she wanted. Our wives expect that—and get it. Don't they?" He shot out his question. But he wasn't so very sure that Louise had got everything she wanted.

Jim was thinking of his own wife. "I guess they do," he said slowly.

"Well, anyway, I thought I got what *I* wanted," he went on. It was a relief to talk of these things. "First I wanted money, and then I wanted power, and—well, Jim, you know—I got them both. And then," he said, leaning slightly forward from his pillows, "I looked at you fellows and I got bored."

"How d'you mean bored?" Jim wasn't quite following.

"I mean just that—bored, fed up. Ever been bored, Jim? Ever wondered whether you weren't missing something?" He had got Jim there. "It's a thrilling game, this money and power desire, and some of us think the thrill of it lasts to the end. Well, I don't." He was emphatic about that. "I gave the best of my brain and body. But I had no time for anything else."

"What d'you mean by anything else?" Jim interrupted, leaning forward in his chair. And in his own eyes a restless light played.

"That's it, Jim. What?" He moved his hands as if he were sorting out a puzzle. "That," he said, "is what I wanted to find out. What is the something else beyond money and power? It might have been sport—hunting and fishing. It might have been art, love—"

"Why do you say might have been?" Jim's green eyes were searching.

"It may be, I mean," he swiftly corrected. "Anyway, it's what I'm after. And I don't know—I don't know," he said. He was thinking that he would never know.

JIM, too, was thinking hard. His forehead was twisted up in ciphers. His red hair glowed in the descended dusk.

"See, Jim?" He waited, and then went on. "I don't know. So I quit the old life. You understand. You're not really satisfied. You've got most all you want. But it's the rest you want—the rest of it that eludes you. Perhaps you don't care as I do. You've got your wife, and a house, and two children. You can't count on children being an answer. Not these days. You're solid financially. You get off every year for a month or so, and you fish and hunt, and send fish and birds to your friends. And you come over here, maybe, and drink a lot. And then what?" He wanted Jim to answer that question.

But Jim couldn't—or wouldn't. "Perhaps you're right," he said slowly, and he prowled off to find an ash receiver for the stub of his cigar. But it was really to hide his face. "You make me wonder, John P.—you make me wonder. I suppose I'm just an ordinary business man going on without time for questions. I hadn't exactly thought about it that way. I hadn't thought—"

He longed to shout: "Don't, then. I'm wrong. There's nothing in it. I'm talking twaddle." But he wasn't so sure. How would it all end? There was only one end for him. He wanted that now to come quickly. For on this day he seemed to have felt all he could ever fully feel again. Then he had his idea. It possessed him suddenly with a tremendous throb of excitement. It was so very simple.

"I won't say I'm not disappointed, John P." Jim turned around to face him again. "But when you say you quit—I know that's final. I know you quit—to go on to something else. And I don't say you're not right. I don't say it."

To go on to something else. Yes, that was it. "Listen, Jim, I've got an idea." He had to try hard to keep his voice steady. He dared not look at his old friend. "We'll celebrate right here. Have dinner in my room. And, Jim, we'll forget all this I've been talking about, and reminisce a bit. How does that go?"

"It goes," said Jim a little heavily. "But damn it all, with you in bed and—"

"That's all right, Jim. I swear I won't bore you any more. We'll have a bang-up party."

"Bore me!" Jim turned to frown at him. "You don't bore me. You—"

"Oh, forget it!" He managed the grin of his boyhood. "Now you go out for a quarter of an hour. Send the waiter you'll find in the hall, to me. Take a look at the park. You might learn something."

Jim grinned back a bit sheepishly. He went, helping himself to another cigar.

It seemed very strange to be alone in his room with Jim's presence so strongly there that those others who had been genuine in their way (he no longer doubted that) were the fainter memories. Cyril, Jean Paul, Dr. Wells, his luncheon guests—he could think of them almost tenderly as people he had frequently misjudged; people who had tended him, borne with him, entertained him. Had they not also contributed to his knowledge? But they were not real to him as Jim was real.

Would he, even had he been able, have gone back and—stayed there? That was the question. Would the old restless forces have driven him forth again? The ache in his heart as he thought of the chance he must lose to win a great case, was the answer. One answer.

Ah, well! He reached under his pillow where he always kept his wallet. The leather was worn and one of the silver corners was missing. But he had bought it on one particularly care-free day, and he had refused to let Cyril buy him a new one.

He fingered the bills slowly, and was still fingering them when the man came in.

"NOW listen," he said. "I want dinner for two served up here, *vite, vite, vite!* Hurry! I want consommé, pheasant, those thin little fried potatoes, peas, endive salad, and the best dessert the chef can invent. Coffee, of course, with liqueurs. I want two double Martinis, and a bottle of Lanson, 1906, if you have it. Otherwise, 1911. Now hustle."

"But, monsieur, Jean Paul told me—" The man was frightened.

"Jean Paul told you nothing. Come here." He had not forgotten the art of showing a hundred-franc note. "That's for you, and another for the chef. Here's fifty for the wine man. I don't want to see him. You can serve us. Do what I tell you, and maybe you'll get another hundred. Understand?"

"Yes, monsieur. Certainly, monsieur."

"Hurry!" he called after the fellow. There was an anonymous creature for you who took your tips and obeyed without question. Useful in this world.

He and old Jim celebrating together. And he would never see the grief in Jim's eyes when later— He had no doubt about that later.

He lay staring out of the window. Everything dark. Only shapes of branches, and the cooler air of evening. He drew his red dressing-gown closer around him.

It was almost an act of courtesy that he was accomplishing. It pleased him to think of releasing them all—before they, too, were wearied. He had imagined them that already. He had been wrong—perhaps.

He was smiling when he heard Jim's step in the hall.

"Nothing the matter with this, is there?" He waved to the table set by his bed. Roses in the center, and the gleam of napery and silver. Everything ready. And here were the cocktails.

At view of them, Jim brightened. "I'm not mad about this bed stunt of yours. But here's to happy days." He was setting the key to the evening—good old Jim! He felt something queer, but he wasn't going to question. Not Jim.

A delicate, a wonderful thrill went through him. He was actually eating, drinking like a normal man. "Serve the wine," he ordered. "Here, hand me that soup, first." He inhaled, tasted. It was worth it. "Remember that fishing trip we took, Jim, when you killed the biggest salmon of the season? I hated you for that salmon." He was off.

"Wasn't that the trip where Tom Grierson fell out of his canoe? What d'you think? His wife's divorcing him. Yes, sir—after twenty years of marriage!" Jim was off, too.

"You don't say? Help yourself, Jim. Yes, I'll have a drop more. I remembered you liked pheasant. The cuisine here is fairly decent."

Jim was telling a story—something about a poker game. "And Bill turned around to this other fellow and said: 'Look here, young man, nobody's ever got the better of me yet. And nobody's going to. I know what I want, and I tell you . . .'" Jim's voice filled the room. He was on familiar ground, everything else forgotten. Jim didn't dwell long on things that puzzled or disturbed him.

It was a good story, but vaguely listening; he lost the point of it. He was thinking that he, too, could say that nobody had ever got the better of him. That wasn't all, though—it wasn't enough.

WHILE Jim, rattling on, wasn't looking, he closed his eyes, and saw suddenly and very clearly that he had not failed life, but that life had failed him in not giving him all that his restless imagination desired. He would never know now what he had missed. And he wondered if that in itself were not a thrilling answer to life.

Jim's laugh rang out. "Can you beat that?"

He opened his eyes and smiled. "I've got to beat it," he said. And he was so pleased at his grim little joke which Jim, of course, couldn't understand, that he chuckled with a wry twist of lip, and began to tell in his old humorous fashion, quite another story.

In the middle of that story, Jim abruptly rose, and stood towering over the coffee and liqueurs which had been left on the table.

"You can't fool me, John P.," he said. "Out with it! What the hell's the matter with you?"

The room seemed to fade away, and he only saw Jim's green eyes steadily fixed on him. It was the right of his oldest friend to know.

He let the silence spread, weaving them together. He let himself look up. "I'd rather you wouldn't ask, Jim," he said quietly. Jim had guessed something. Jim wouldn't ask. Jim obscurely understood.

Jim went back to his chair. He drank his coffee down at a gulp. He lit a cigar. He poured a liqueur. Old brandy warm to the throat. His hands weren't quite steady, poor old Jim!

"I was telling one of my best stories, Jim."

"Go on, John P."

But he waited a moment to let that deep intimate silence engulf them once more; that silence which took them back and back and forward a pace together in the unknown. He would never be lonely again. He would not be afraid. Jim had walked with him a few steps along the road he was to go.

And then he went on with his story.

GUNWOMAN

Reason Said to This Modern Wife, "Be Generous," When Her Husband Offended; but Instinct Was Too Much for Her

By Sonya Levien

Illustration by Paul L. Gill

BABY LAMB II, the forty-foot boat that John Bainbridge sported over the Sound with such possessive enjoyment, was a present from his father-in-law, Louis Lamb. Louis liked to give presents to John and Nora and John liked to refer to them as Louis's spiritual reparation for the outlandish tips he extorted as head waiter at the Carlton. Nora seldom failed to be amused by her husband's impudent jokes at the expense of her generous father, for John had no intention of giving offense. She herself was a mute, painfully shy person, and looked upon her husband's glibness with envious admiration.

Nora was secretly aware that her father's gifts were tokens of gratitude to John for making her happy. John had been a very good husband for five years.

Nora's mother died when Nora was an infant and ever since nothing in the world mattered to Louis Lamb except that his motherless child should be happy. When she was a baby he bought the best possible care for her he could afford, yet during the hours he was forced to spend away from her he was a mass of quivering apprehension for fear that the neighbor who took care of her might be secretly cruel. When she grew older he gave her a good education. He wanted her to be "a lady," to use his own expression, and lavished upon her furs and jewels, orchid corsages, all the finery that would make Nora into a dainty, precious, snippy young flapper. Nora was a grateful little soul but much too modest. Sometimes he ached with disappointment. She had no instinct for treating her young men like dirt.

Louis was famous as a head waiter. Some of the best men in America shook hands with him. However, it took more than his salary and tips to give his daughter class. So Louis speculated in real estate. Being an intuitively shrewd person he specialized in shore acres when shore acres were salt marshes. Consequently, he drove to the service entrance of the Carlton in a new eight-cylinder Packard and had a Spanish house in Rye.

But this is Nora and John Bainbridge's story, not Louis Lamb's.

John Bainbridge steered his new boat among the rocks and shallows of Long Island Sound by some sixth sense. His entire attention was taken up with the building and smashing of air castles. He hated to be disloyal to Nora. She was so soft and devoted, always there, a tranquil little soul smoothing out the wrinkles of existence for him. Nothing unexpected, adventurous could come from her. As for Gabriella—there might be dark valleys of discomfort but also there would be heights—glorious, sunshiny, thrilling heights, wonderment and surprise. Glorious Gabriella!

The smoothness of the water at twilight shining like mother-of-pearl, the cool silver spray licking the sides of the proud little vessel, the green shoreline streaked with blue shadow and the red and gold of the setting sun—the unutterable beauty about him turned John's yearning into despair. He sniffed the sea air and relished the taste of salt. . . . "Being thwarted means sharp pain to the man with strong emotions, so sharp that it is exhilarating. Strong men have strong desires and what people choose to call profligacy is merely the unharnessed primitive in man." This lively bit of philosophy was a pleasing thought. It made transgression a manly indulgence. John was too enamored of his own exalted mood to notice that Nora, his wife, was staring at him with murder in her eyes.

THE boat's steady chug-chug in thick silence had a hypnotic effect on Nora. She forgot her husband for a moment and looked out over the water. The strangeness of her lost happiness hung over her.

Nora's mind leaped rapidly over the circumstances of her marriage. She had met John at the home of her college room-mate, Nancy Bainbridge. At school Nancy had often boasted of this clever cousin of hers who wrote. John met Nora, fell in love with her, and impetuously wooed and married her against the advice of Nancy's mother.

Aunt Millicent, Nancy's mother, was a formidable woman. She had the morals of a Victorian dowager and the speech of a youthful swashbuckler. Nancy was the daughter of her middle age and she disapproved of her and her friends thoroughly. When John told her of his engagement she was shockingly rude in her comments upon modern promiscuity; yet after Nora became a member of her precious family she was a genuine enough person to be for her. In this crisis she took Nora's part.

But John's friends felt quite differently. Merit was reckoned by the amount of living one could get away with. They were young men and women who refused to be satisfied with their given lot; in whom some restless urge demanded that life should be a panorama of beautiful fairy tales. They decided immediately that Nora was foolish to lose all power of speech and stay hidden from them just because John was in an experimental mood.

Sure enough, Nora admitted, there had been jealousies before! John had a way with women. At the start he was brusque with them: that frightened and attracted them. Then he might become suddenly gentle and disclose an almost feminine shyness to those he liked—which made him quite irresistible. He talked to girls about their beauty and their intelligence and the heavenly wonder of such a combination of qualities in one and the same being. Flattering John! His strong frame, his look of outdoor health and cleanness, the engaging fact that he wrote and edited besides giving important courses in literature at a university—a professor not old and moth-eaten but the very opposite has a glamour—did the rest. Girls knew instinctively that John was the sort of man who could be caught, with effort, and that it would be thrillingly worth trying.

Nora had had to be jealously voluble, almost eloquent, on occasions but John's keen enjoyment of the scene was sufficient guarantee of his real preference. He invariably succeeded in wiping away her misgivings with his kisses and his kidding.

JOHN loved her. There was no doubt of that. For five years anyhow he had loved her with an intensity that satisfied her deepest soul. Had she ever committed the sin of taking his devotion for granted? No! She had never lost consciousness of the miracle of John's love and had been humbly grateful for her blessed fortune.

Nora had absorbed something of her father's professional humility, for she often felt unworthy of John's clever circle though she was a Vassar graduate and had a delicate precious sort of beauty. She was fragile and blonde, had an elfin face with pointed chin, the slender bodily charm of a dancer, and a finely bred appearance which would have carried her anywhere had she had more confidence in herself. As it was she attributed her own popularity to being John's wife. Certainly the happy relationship had made her vivid.

This affair with Gabriella Hunt was unbearable. Nora sensed at their third meeting that the flirting game they were playing was no longer a game, but an alliance that was charged with adventure and emotion, exaltation and misery. This time Nora was afraid to give way to her jealousy, to provoke a confession from John. As long as she did not hear the truth by word of mouth there were moments when she could almost persuade herself she was exaggerating the seriousness of this attachment.

But that afternoon she had suffered humiliation. She and John had been to Nancy's tea party given to introduce a new find of Nancy's, a talented Jew who combined music and the brokerage business successfully and with charm. Aunt Millicent's summer house was at Rye. All friends who could be gathered in Westchester County were there. John and Gabriella had drawn aside from the others, whispering, silent, owl-eyed, unaware of the comments concerning them. John's own desire was strong upon him and his wife's look of misery failed to deter him. Nora avoided watching them for the curious were gauging the effect upon her.

Aunt Millicent did not approve of John and Gabriella making a show of themselves in her house and she acted in her aggressive, heavy-handed manner. "Look at John and Gabriella," she called out to Nora in her loud masculine voice. "Mooncalfing at your age! Come and help with the cakes, John."

Everybody turned. John arose, embarrassed. His tongue failed him where he was deeply concerned.

"You're a wicked old woman!" was all he managed to say as he took the plate from her outstretched hand.

"That dying-fish expression does not go with your eloquence, my boy." His terrible aunt dug him in the ribs viciously.

Gabriella came over to where Nora was sitting and put an arm around her and squeezed her affectionately. Thus fortified, she seemed to enjoy Aunt Millicent's attack more than the others. Nora hated Gabriella at that moment as she had never hated any one in all her life. She did not know how to defend herself against the embrace. To have acted naturally would not have been considered thoroughbred in this game they seemed to be playing.

THE pilot came from below and took the wheel. John awoke to his surroundings. The boat was sidling up the dock and Nora had arisen and was waiting to be helped ashore. John took her hand and his heart thumped with uneasiness, with foreboding. Nora's lips were drawn determinedly shut against the words that were choking her. All the way home there had been that thick, painful silence which had separated them ever since Gabriella had become a factor in his life, barely a month before. Either side feared the provocation of speech lest it break the dam of pent-up emotion. John hoped to hide with silence that which constantly occupied his mind while Nora dared not speak for fear of knowing the truth.

They walked up an irregular stone path which led from the water's edge to their summer home at Tokeneke. That home, too, was a present from Louis Lamb, to celebrate the third anniversary of Nora's happiness. John felt uncomfortable to be alone with Nora and thus he was led into saying the very thing he meant to avoid saying:

"Did you enjoy Nancy's tea, dear?"

Nora nodded and ran ahead, bending down to pick a wild aster here and there. The tears she had struggled to keep back poured down her face. That tenderness in his voice! A man's compassion for a dumb animal he had pained. How could he be so cruel and tender at the same time?

They reached the porch. The house was of stucco, Spanish in style. The arched portico, tile-paved and ivy-covered, framed the sea. This home of theirs was a beautiful possession. They loved it.

John did not sit down. He weaved in and out of the chintz-covered furnishings with uncertain movements. He wanted to get away by himself, yet had something to say to Nora.

"He's like a small boy," thought Nora, "afraid of punishment yet determined to stick to his line of conduct and wanting approval at the same time." Nora's stern expression softened. He could always get her with that small-boy look of his! She took hold of his sleeve as he passed her and lifted herself from the couch. It was an excuse to touch him. She yearned for some word from him that would assure her of the unreality of their estrangement. "Please, dear God, let him say it to me!" she prayed.

John winced at the touch of her fingers and gently moved away. Something within Nora froze. She shivered. Underneath her gentleness and humility there was a deep-seated self-respect. She could endure infinitely, but to be told that her ardor was unwanted, shamed her and made her ill.

"I'm going upstairs to dress," she said in a firm voice, and started indoors.

"So am I, pettie."

He followed her in, and in the semi-darkness of the hall risked what he wanted to say: "By the way, Nora, Bob and Gabriella said they might drop in after dinner."

Nora stopped and opened her mouth to exclaim, "Why can't they stay home occasionally!" but closed it again without speech.

She couldn't face the consequences of such a remark. She dashed up the stairs and into her dressing-room. If she could only break something, hurt somebody! She closed the door to their bedroom, where John usually dressed, and leaned against it, out of breath, shivering as with cold. "You mustn't let yourself go! You mustn't let yourself go! Play the game, Nora Lamb!"

JOHN was trying to open the door. Nora went swiftly to her dressing table and began to take down her hair. John came into the room and drew up a chair with great deliberation. He was not content with the way Nora had received the announcement of Gabriella's coming, or certain of her cordial reception. His expression was patient yet determined. He was going to make his dear little silly wife see things straight!

"Don't you want them to come, dear?" he began.

Nora shrugged indifferently.

"Is it because you're tired?"

Nora shook her head.

"Can't you speak?"

Silence.

"Why this sudden desire for solitude?" His voice was metallic. He was staring at her hatefully.

Nora left her chair and went to her wardrobe and fumbled among her gowns. She had too much to say for safety.

"Why don't you speak what's on your mind?" he asked crossly.

Her mind was hot with unspoken words. She wanted to tell him that before Gabriella came into his life he was glad enough to spend an occasional quiet evening at home; that she was not going to be the recipient of friendly pity because he had stopped caring and did not have the decency to spare her feelings before their friends. But she could not bear to speak of his desertion. It was a failure too bitter to acknowledge. "I intended," she said, "to run over and see Dad."

For a moment John became elated at the possibility of her absence and then he remembered that he had also invited Charles Bentley, a friend of Nora's school days. Aloud he said: "I also asked Bentley to drop in. You seemed to enjoy him at Nancy's tea this afternoon." He spoke as if he nursed a grievance.

The cheek of the man! thought Nora. Or was he trying to force the discussion along dangerous channels? Well, she was not going to give him the chance! She began to comb her hair vigorously. Her mind raced on. So he had done the inviting, after all, and Bentley was the oblation to ease his conscience.

Her iron resistance made him irritable. He was determined to arrive at a less turbulent state of mind and enjoy the evening. "Why didn't you tell me you were going to see father?"

"Three times a week is too much of Gabriella for me!" There, it was out, and Nora was thoroughly frightened.

"If I'm generous enough to let you have Bentley—"

"Too obvious, John. Last month you flung Bob at my head. Peace offerings!"

"If you're middle-class enough to be jealous, I have nothing further to say."

John arose and with dignity and indignation stalked into the bedroom, banging the door behind him in protest.

Nora wondered if jealousy was really a bourgeois trait. She would have liked to argue about that and was cross with herself for not having had the courage to stand up against John. She was a coward! Just as she had been a coward about her father. Now that grievances against John were on the table, Nora reviewed the one about her father. She had not faced it before.

LOUIS LAMB had lived at Nora's after her marriage. Neither of them dreamed that they could live apart. Her father made the arrangement a satisfactory one financially. His wedding gift to his children was an apartment in fee. It was a duplex affair in one of those palatial structures owned coöperatively by a group of artists on the west side of Central Park. Louis's suite of two rooms was tucked out of the way. He kept modestly to himself and all would have gone well except for the meals. They proved to be a problem, especially when there were guests. In spite of his affluence Louis had never outgrown the manner of a head waiter. He would sit squeezed low in his chair, oppressed by the knowledge that he was expected to be one of the company. If any one spoke to him it made him nervous and he would cover his tension with an artificial manner of good will and hilarity, start an inexhaustible line of funny stories, kneading his hands all the while and end with the flicker of an imaginary towel over one arm. John would become glum and Nora unhappy and Louis more nervous than ever until he almost drummed on his belt line.

But Louis was a tactful man. After a few months of this sort of existence he found an excuse to move away. He went to live with a friend, Captain Gregory, a pilot commander who suffered from rum and rheumatism and had given up the ocean for the Sound. The captain listened for hours to Louis's palaver about how nice John was and noticed that he seldom spoke of Nora, but that when he did his voice would become gruff and casual and he would assume an independent manner so as to hide a longing for his daughter he did not dare to face.

Nora now upbraided herself for a weak character. She had tried to ease her own conscience by telephones and frequent visits; nevertheless, she had let her father go without a protest. Love had made a coward of her.

Nora finished her dressing hurriedly. She had no heart for the task. This was an occasion she should try to look her best, try to put her rival's eye out! How absurd were the recipes of heart experts in a real case! To compete with Gabriella would be ridiculous as well as cheap.

Gabriella had foreign blood in her. Nora was under the impression that it was Russian blood, though there seemed to be conflicting evidence about the fact. However, she made the most of whatever it was in her charming accent, in her passionate enthusiasms, and in her ability to make prodigious use of a smattering education. She had that swift, wild look of the untamed boy—a creature just escaped from the forest. Her blue-black hair was bobbed like a boy's and attractive because it belonged to a girl. She dressed with a picturesqueness that would have made any one except Gabriella seem grotesque. Her skin was pale apricot and she painted her lips an orange-red. Nora felt that a pale blonde like herself just faded out to insignificance beside Gabriella.

During dinner husband and wife made an effort to drown the heavy silence with impersonal conversation, but both minds were preoccupied. Nora tried to formulate some program of behavior which would disguise her misery, make her less an outsider in her own home. How did other women handle such a situation? She could not recollect any case she had ever read about or heard of that could be of help to her in her own dilemma.

BENTLEY arrived first. He was a dramatic critic and the type of young man that makes the perfect guest—affable, full of delightful stories of the theater and its fascinating people, doing his share to make the occasion pleasant. Nora's lonely heart responded. She found herself conversing easily and naturally for the first time in weeks.

John sat apart, frankly self-absorbed, until Gabriella and Bob came. Bob joined Nora. He was a man full of stuttering conversation, seldom to the point and always superlative. Nora's self-confidence began to leave her as she became aware of Gabriella's attention—aloof, critical, superior. Nora was silenced and Gabriella began to play the game. She was sweet. She tried to draw Nora out, ignoring John and yet marking him out and arousing him by flattering his wife at his expense—charging Nora with silent depths beyond John's comprehension; enumerating the iniquities of man, lauding the greater courage and daring of a woman. Nora did not agree and Gabriella began to prove her point by example.

"What would you do, Nora, if you discovered that John was unfaithful?" she asked.

The blood rushed to Nora's head. Her heart hurt with rapid beating. She was terror-stricken. Was Gabriella going to ask her right then and there to give up John? That woman had the nerve to do it!

"Nothing courageous or daring, I'm afraid," Nora managed to say.

"You'd have to do something," persisted Gabriella. "Would you be noble or—"

John's face was pale with anguish. He tried to hypnotize Gabriella into silence. She returned his stare calmly and went on, "—or would you cut your rival's heart out?"

Bentley took the bit. "What would you do, Gabriella, if Bob chucked you?"

All turned to Gabriella.

"Look, Bob!" Bentley pointed. "Your wife's dancing eyes tell me that the prospect pleases."

"Don't believe him, Bobbie darling. But if you ever did chuck me, I've got it all planned," she began enthusiastically. "My wounded vanity will demand sacrifice. Human beings will be thrown to it as to some ravenous god until the very last day of my life, when, at the age of fifty or so I shall die in a romantic adventure on the streets of Port Said."

Bob surveyed the group with beaming face, soliciting praise for his clever spouse. "Doesn't she beat the devil?"

Gabriella leaned over and stroked Bob's face. "The old dear appreciates my capacity."

"You demand a lot from life," Nora ventured.

Gabriella was never at a loss. "Nora sweet, I've got so much vitality I need lots of love in my life!"

"Victorious Gabriella!" thought Nora, and became unhappily aware of her own inability to talk as she listened further. Gabriella was now wound up, analyzing all of them, speaking knowingly of man's biological necessities, poking fun at the marriage relationship until domesticity seemed a crime, pricking at secrets that held them all breathless yet with so light and casual a touch that no one could take personal offense without being crude.

A desire to be ruthless, to hurt Gabriella and John, came over Nora. How she longed for that sophistication which would make it possible for her to discuss John's affair with that woman—first with sympathy and approval, then to run her teeth into it, measure it, denude it, until it became ridiculous!

Bentley stretched and rose to go. "Here's where one biological failure goes home to his mama."

Nora secretly blessed him for going. She was weary of interminable conversations about love and marriage. Immediately after Bentley left she made the excuse of a headache and went upstairs.

She undressed quickly and got into bed. Her limbs ached as if she had been beaten. Sleep did not come. Her mind kept grinding away relentlessly: How did some women become independent of their emotions? The husband and wife who were able to discuss their relations in public—did they love each other? Or was it a sort of open warfare? Were they saying in public what they dared not say in private? Anyhow, such women seemed to be very sure of themselves and above pity. Pity sapped one's confidence! Now, what should she do? . . . She dozed off.

NORA awoke with a start and switched on the lamp. Some instinct in her sensed danger. She heard whispering somewhere—or was it a cry that had wakened her? The red morocco-cased clock showed twenty minutes past two, and John was not beside her. Nora trembled in alarm and foreboding. Without stopping to slip into her mules she went downstairs. All was in darkness. She was feeling for the switch in the hall when she heard the voices again and recognized them. Instantly she was wide awake. She tiptoed nearer without qualms at eavesdropping. She was fiercely bent upon discovering the extent of their passion.

John was speaking too low for her to make out the words, but his voice was vibrant, pleading. He was urging some step upon Gabriella. The clue came from her answer. "Don't be absurd, Johnny boy! You forget that I have two gallumpfing children and you're not at all paternally inclined."

"They're your children and I've always thought them sweet."

Gabriella was adamant. "Honestly, I couldn't hurt Nora, she's so gentle. Johnny boy, do be sensible! Let's go on as we are. This way we are harming no one."

Harming no one? They were cutting her up into bits!

Nora's hand shook and she was unable to control the electric button. "John!" she called weakly.

John stumbled against her in the dark. Lights were turned on. "I'm here, Nora." He was at her side in a second. "Have you been asleep, dear?" His calm tone was assumed with difficulty. Nora felt him shiver as if from cold. Her own teeth were chattering with nervousness.

"It's so late, John!" Nora found herself complaining helplessly. She had called his name with the wild purpose of begging him not to leave her, of imploring Gabriella to give him up, to go away; of throwing herself at their mercy and asking them to spare her. Instead she kept repeating in imbecilic fashion, "It's so late!"

"You look very tired, Nora dear," said

Gabriella, a cool and rather bored observer. "We didn't realize it was so late, but here comes Bob with the car. It's been a divine night."

Nora trailed upstairs and curled herself up at the foot of the bed. Her nerves pulled at her like a sore tooth; her limbs shook with cold and there was an uncomfortable moistness over her body. She said to herself: "I, too, feel cool and collected. It couldn't have been worse if I had found him gone." There was a certain relief in facing facts. Now that she knew the worst she was prepared to have it out with him.

She would begin: "Sit down , John, I want to speak to you. I heard you and Gabriella. Eavesdropping? How about Gabriella making love to my husband in my own house and behind my back?" After that—after that—oh, yes! "I noticed she wasn't as keen about your little proposal as you were." That would hurt, came the glad thought. "But there is no need for Gabriella to make a noble sacrifice for my sake. You can go! I don't want to share my man with another woman. Go! Go!"

Tears of self-pity interrupted the flow of silent words. "Please God, curse that woman!" she wept out loud. Why did not John come? Perhaps they had gone after all. Nora struggled desperately to pull herself together. She despised a hysterical woman.

Her mind began to work again. "If he gives me that old argument that love means power and development to a man, I shall say: 'John, if you are one of those men who can only develop through the love of an endless chain of understanding women, then I've served my purpose. Let Gabriella go on with the good work!' Why doesn't he come? He's gone—he's gone with her!"

SHE heard his steps. He came into the room and without looking her way began to prepare for bed. Her eyes followed him round. She observed the slick way the tanned skin was drawn over his limbs and wondered if the painful squeezing of her heart was what a mother felt who looked for the last time at the adored toes of a dead child. With all her heart she wished him dead at that moment. It would be easier to give him to the grave than to let this woman have him.

John was having his bad moments but determined not to give way. He got into bed and forced himself to look at her. "Are you going to sit up any longer, pettie?"

"John, I want to speak to you."

"I'm dead tired, dear. Keep it for tomorrow." He snuggled under the covers. "There's a sea breeze on. Do come to bed; you'll get chilled."

Nora made no move and John sat up with a jerk.

"Well, what is it now?" he questioned crossly.

"I'm going home."

"Home?"

"To father—for good."

"When? Now?"

"In the morning."

"Then there's plenty of time." His hand reached for the chain of the bed-lamp.

Nora jumped off the bed. His indifference drove her mad. "You—you can go to hell with that woman! I'm through with you for good and all!"

John stared at his wife with astonishment. "Control yourself!" he commanded sternly.

She started to leave him but he caught hold of her and forced her on to the edge of the bed. "Don't be a dramatic fool, Nora dear. I don't want to go off with Gabriella—neither does she."

"Please let me go!" Nora tried to free herself.

"I suppose you think I've stopped caring for you, you little imbecile!"

He tried to touch her cheeks with his lips but she pulled away, steeling herself against his gentleness.

"You love Gabriella?" she asked.

His face flushed. He remained silent.

IT WAS like forcing a knife into her flesh with her own hands, yet Nora persisted doggedly. "You are in love with Gabriella?"

"Yes." A pause. "Women will never understand it, but a man can love two women at the same time."

"Not for long."

"Stop philosophizing and face facts a bit. You are never content to leave me alone. I owe it to myself not to be a slave to your wishes, and to keep my own individuality. I am willing that you should be free to choose your own friends. Then why should you not grant me the same privilege? Isn't that fair?"

"It sounds fair but somehow I know it isn't. Maybe if I didn't care—"

"If you cared, Nora, you wouldn't force me to choose between you two."

"You love her—your choice is made."

"As if anybody can help falling in love! Do you think I planned this mess? Just listen to me, Nora dear. Your mind is hard. You see things only as right or wrong. I wish I were so cut and dried, but I'm not. There are things I do and want to do that frighten me but I'd rather be dead than not do them. Don't be controlled by your own feelings; take pity on mine. I pray that I may come round your way—but don't push me. That only puts me off."

"I refuse to be the victim of your feelings—that isn't fair, either. Anyhow, I've had all I want of your emotional experiments!"

Nora struggled free and dashed into her dressing-room, shutting the door between them. She lay down upon the couch and pulled the Jaeger blanket over her shivering body. . . . He loved Gabriella! From his own lips. . . . She lay a long time wondering whether John had gone to sleep. Perhaps he would still come in and comfort her by saying that he did not love Gabriella after all.

The door opened and John walked in. He looked unhappy, not sure of himself, and paced up and down a long time before he could speak. Finally he seemed to come to a decision. "I won't see Gabriella again if you say so."

"That's for you to decide."

He seemed to be determined to put it up to his wife. "Do you insist?"

"That's too easy, John. It would give you grounds for nursing a grievance the rest of your life!"

John slammed the door and left her to lie awake and curse the night for its length.

NORA closed her summer home at Tokeneke early. The year before she and John had stayed through October, dazzled and excited by summer's brilliant swan song, counting it the finest month of their year. Youth responded to the invigorating air of autumn with its clear sunshine, to the smell of the woods and sea, to the sight of a world tinted with the extravagant brush of a Gauguin. But their deepest content lay in the quiet hours together. Schools had taken the children, children their parents and the country was pleasantly deserted.

But this year Nora was glad to see the last of the place by September. In New York she and John lived on terms of armed neutrality, leaving each other alone as much as possible. Each dreaded hurting the other; each was coldly impersonal. John gave the impression of a man who carried about a deep sense of unspoken grievance. The old hostile silence settled upon them and they were afraid to be left together. If they were faced by the prospect of an evening at home Nora developed a headache and took to her room and conscientiously urged John to go to the theater or to some dancing place. She refused to play the pathetic wife lagging in the wake of her restless man.

John developed a passion for dancing. He gathered about him a new group of friends. He flaunted an impersonal fondness for the whole female species. Nora reasoned that this promiscuity was probably an effort to overcome his restlessness, and was torn between the impulse to send him back to Gabriella and a jealous resentment of his mood. Nevertheless, she continued to encourage him to go out with other women, for she hoped thereby he might forget Gabriella. Then again, John had asked for time. She would give it to him—not because of any generous impulse but because she could not face existence without him.

Thus the winter dragged itself to an end. Never before had Nora reckoned with such loneliness. To live in close intimacy with a man—sharing every moment, every thought, every emotion; to talk, to play, to eat, to breathe together, in a union so close and dear that one has lost the consciousness of one's self—and then to live in the same house with the same man, separated by antagonism—strangers! That was Nora's idea of hell on earth. Added to that was the constant shame that while her whole being was absorbed with John, his was occupied with another woman.

ONE fine afternoon it suddenly dawned upon Nora that the trees in the park were coming into leaf. The voices of children came to her through the opened windows. With the smell of spring and the laughter of children an exhilaration of spirit came over Nora. She gazed out meditatively. "This can't last forever," she consoled herself. She would stop brooding and bestir herself. Then and there she determined to abdicate all claim upon John's affection and to be satisfied with such companionship as old age might bring. She was twenty-eight!

With this resolution, there came an unexpected song in her heart. She felt cheerful enough to go and seek out her father. She had avoided him for weeks. She could not bear to meet his eyes—devoted eyes filled with mute apprehension. Today she felt she could put the anxiety in those devoted eyes to rest—temporarily, at least.

On her way out she met her Aunt Millicent, who demanded a cup of tea. Aunt Millicent coming for tea was heresy! It was as if a captain had left his sea liner and had come asking for a ride on some ferryboat. Millicent Bainbridge's tea table was a place of restoration for men and women who boasted knowing New York when Harlem was a wilderness.

Nora was delighted and flattered and urged the old lady to return with her to the apartment.

"No, my dear. I've got a new frock on and am out for a killing. Take me to the Mary Jane Tea House."

"How jazzy you're becoming!" cried Nora with amusement, and squeezed the satin-clothed arm affectionately.

In the limousine Aunt Millicent gave Nora a swift side glance. The girl seemed to be genuinely cheerful, though pale and tired-looking. The old woman's heart filled with compassion. "The poor blind kitten!" she thought. "How lonely she must be to be set up by the company of an old battle-ax like myself!" She let Nora babble on without listening. For a time she weakened in her plan, but soon she recovered her purpose and said, "I've really come to talk to you about John."

All the gaiety fled from Nora, and there came again that sudden pain in her chest. "Yes?"

The aunt hesitated. "Let's have our tea first."

Nora lost her voice and vivacity and the aunt took up the chatter. "I've rented my house at Rye—a thing I've never done before. I don't approve of people living in other people's houses."

Nora aroused herself sufficiently to show her surprise. "How did it happen?"

"You've heard of Schuyler Runyon? Well, he's taken a new wife and like most elderly grooms is making a fool of himself. This girl he's married is a high diver and has taken a fancy to the springboard off my dock. He came and offered me an absurd sum of money. I told him I did not want to sell the place. 'I'm offering you this as summer's rent,' he explained. I'm a weak woman and the amount tempted me. Considering the present rate of exchange I suppose it's enough to take me half around the world."

They were at their table and sipping their tea by this time. Nora saw Aunt Millicent's eyes dilate as they looked past her. She turned and saw at a table across the room John and Gabriella yearning at each other. They were partly hidden by the high backs of the settees they occupied. Nora's tea spilled, and it scalded Aunt Millicent's hand.

"Don't worry about my hand," said the old lady. "I wanted to see if you really cared or whether you were one of these smart Aleck young wives who encourage their husbands to have tarts with their tea. Now I know where you stand and can give you a piece of my mind."

NORA recovered from the numbing blow and began to defend John's set.

"Don't put on a front before me!" said the aunt irritably. "Everybody's talking about them and you. This is apparently one of their regular meeting-places. Nancy was going to put you wise and I beat her to it because—"

"Please, please, Aunt Millicent! After all, John is quite grown up. He and I have discussed Gabriella. I understand perfectly."

"Never mind your pride, Nora. Replace it with a bit of sense. It's all your fault, anyway."

Nora looked at her mentor and her eyes filled with tears. She could not trust herself to speak. She was too close to weeping her heart out.

"It's your fault," the aunt repeated emphatically.

"But a lady—"

"You're not being a lady but just trying to be modern and sophisticated when you sponsor your husband's love affair."

"I do nothing of the sort! I merely refuse to interfere with my husband's liberty," Nora defended herself.

"Liberty, me eye! *Adultery*, they used to call it in my youth. Don't fake, Nora. In your heart you do not feel magnanimous toward Gabriella. Then why take a pose that this affair is none of your business? Is it not affecting your welfare?"

"You know we are not primitive beings any more."

"That's bunk!"

"One must play the game nowadays," went on Nora.

"Play the game! I'm tired of that phrase. A fool's game, I call it, this sitting by, assuming indifference yet eating your heart out and hoping for the best. The result is inevitable. Love thrives on handicaps. Only a fool of a woman sits with folded hands when her husband is in love with another female—unless she's got nothing to gain by interfering. I won't have John disgrace himself or torture you!"

"WHAT would you have me do?" Nora managed to ask.

"I should horsewhip her at sight!"

"I thought you were going to give me practical advice."

"I am. The very first time you saw her getting hold of John you should have given her the high-sign of '*Hands off!*' "

"Aunt Milly, you're positively—"

"Vulgar! Say it. But effective always. Look here, Nora: I'm a sensible woman and do not expect too much nobility from human nature—either from others or myself. No doubt it is difficult for young people to appreciate the compensations of regularity. Well, then, you must stuff the disadvantages of irregularity down their throats. It isn't loyalty that keeps a man monogamous but the fear of public opinion—being called a fool by the men at the club, a knave by the family, a Bluebeard and Pinney Earle by the elder women of his acquaintance; and most of all, he is kept monogamous by the law which compels him to pay alimony. Men like to kid themselves. They consider the outcome and stick, then tell themselves they are loyal beings."

"I should hate to live if I thought that was true."

"Don't be a sentimental fool."

"That makes it three times that you've called me a fool. When are you going to Europe?"

"The end of June."

"Take me with you."

"I'll do nothing of the sort! No running away. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, not to have the grit to control your husband; at any rate to let them know where they get off."

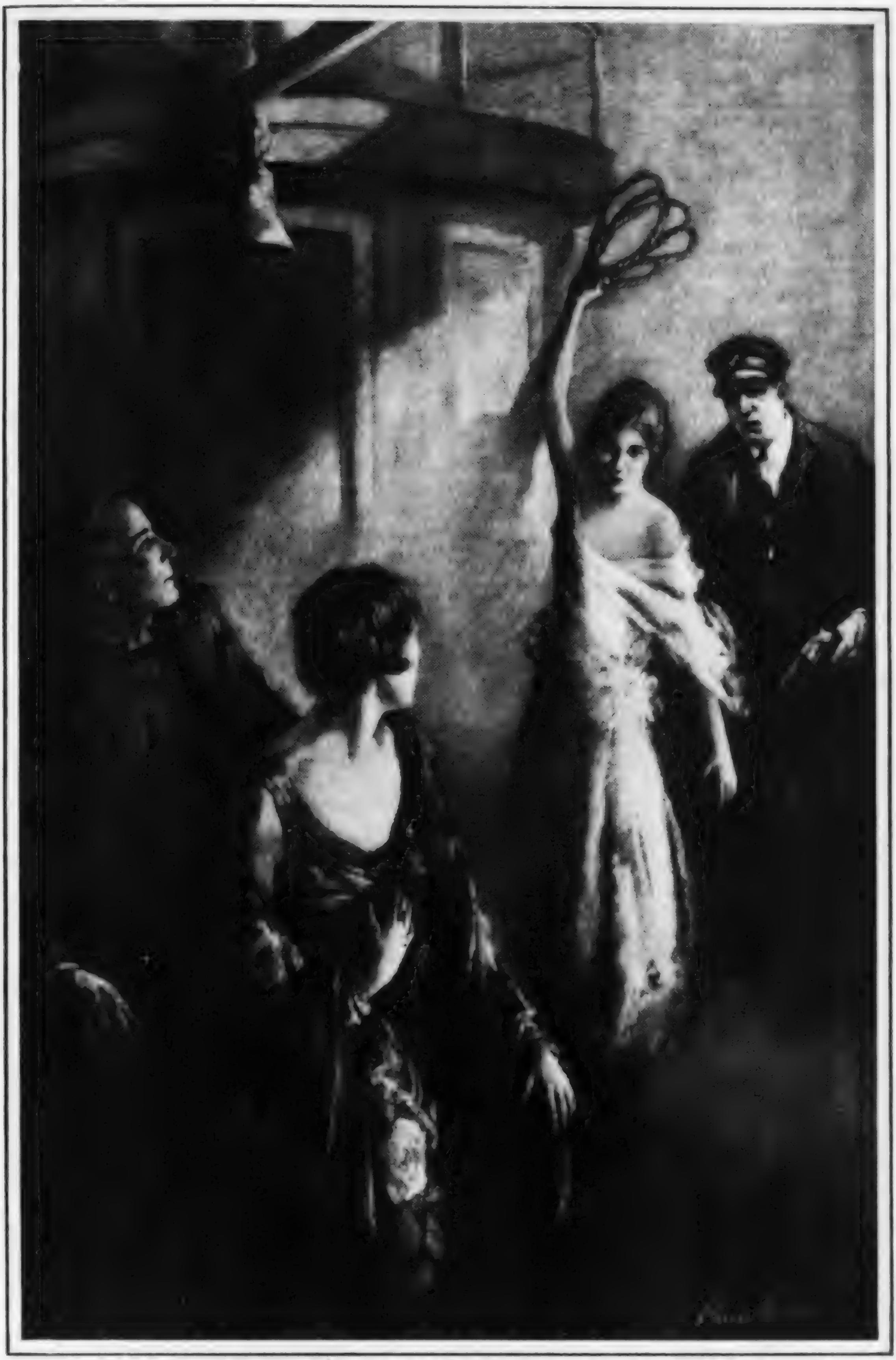
Nora made a quieting gesture. John and Gabriella were preparing to leave. The aunt half rose in her seat and called to her nephew. John recognized the peremptory voice and turned quickly. His face became scarlet, then deathly pale, but he walked toward his family with a defiant lift of his shoulders. He greeted them with a cheerfulness that was too emphatic and talked to both at once. Nora could almost feel his heart beating.

Gabriella approached, her hand outstretched to Nora. The aunt, still standing, turned upon her. The old lady's face was rather terrible and Nora became panic-stricken. Without premeditation, hardly knowing what she was doing, Nora greeted Gabriella as a long-lost sister. The aunt made a queer, hissing sound, shrugged her shoulders and sat down. She ignored all of them and gave her attention to her tea.

John had the strength of purpose to go on his way with Gabriella, after which the aunt had a satisfying time emptying her spleen upon Nora and the philosophy of the younger generation. Eventually she left her niece to her own devices and drove home.

Nora started up the Avenue. Thank Heaven she was alone! She struggled to isolate her mind from the emotions that were tearing her to pieces. Other women might get a hysterical orgy out of such a situation. Not she! That's where having a mind and education counted. Then, to her own surprise, she began to sob, first little short sobs of self-pity, then deep long ones that tore at her chest and shook her body. At the Plaza where she turned sharply toward the park, her sobs were attracting attention. A swift motor came tearing down upon her. "Here's my escape!" flashed through her mind, and she stood stark still in the way of the car. "He will know why I did it!"

When the car was upon her and she heard the brakes grinding, she jumped backward out of the way, falling upon the edge of the



Nora snatched a coil of rope, then, with the frightening noise of one crying in a nightmare, lashed out with all her strength.

sidewalk. So close had been the contact that the mudguard had torn away her fur scarf and carried it down the street. Some uncontrollable instinct of self-preservation had saved her body, but her spirit went to pieces. She sat on the walk and sobbed hysterically.

An angry passer-by shook his fist at the disappearing car; another brought the fur scarf and helped Nora to her feet. She assured her unknown friends that she was not hurt, merely frightened, and with a sickly smile approved of the anathema they cast upon all automobiles.

AT THE corner of Fifty-ninth Street she got into a hack and asked to be driven about in the park. The spring day had ushered in an evening prematurely warm. The tall buildings on Fifth Avenue and Broadway were half lost in mist. From the park they looked like giant ghosts illuminated by electric signs, fog-softened, monster-headed jewels made of emeralds, rubies, sapphires and diamonds! She thought of the times she and John had driven through the park, light-hearted, holding hands, breathing in the beauty of this Arabian Nights spectacle. Ghosts of her dead happiness. Now she was utterly alone in the world!

Her mind began to conjure up calamities for her. All self-reliance was gone; panic beset her. John had told her love was a protective force and she had innocently believed him. She knew better now. Love was a destructive force—it had broken her strength.

When she fell in love with John she had given herself up to love and love alone. Some women gave themselves that way. Now she realized that it was an improvident thing to do. Fear took possession of her. She tried to reason it away. "A woman's pride is hurt when she has not been able to keep her husband's love, but that should not undermine her character. There are many great women . . ." She repeated with deep satisfaction the names of beautiful and talented women who had been forced to seek divorces because their husbands had fallen in love with some one else.

Yet the best reasoning is demoralized by blighted vanity. Other women's tragedies were nothing to her. Her mind worked in circles and without purpose until tears and the chill of night dulled sensation.

But she stuck to her stoic resolution. Instead of weeping blue rings under her eyes she would do better to free herself from the slavery of her love. These obsessing thoughts about John would drive her crazy unless she found some other outlet. From now on she would isolate herself from John's moods and interests and create new ones for herself. When she got over caring about him she would leave him, if he still continued his romantic career. She returned home less depressed, again determined to accept the situation and say nothing to John about the afternoon. Aunt Milly's way was not the way of the present. In fact, it was wiser that he and Gabriella should see each other openly and with her approval. It might stop the gossips.

AUNT MILLICENT had postponed her sailing on account of the heat. Missing her house and ever regretting her rapacity, she lay propped up in bed, sipping hot tea, her windows shut tight against the sun, shades pulled, and all the electric lights going. So Nora found her and proposed a plan which was as much a surprise to John as it was to the irritable old lady. The Fourth of July that year held out the prospect of a long week-end and Nora, without consulting John—because she meant it to be a measure of independence—had decided to take a cruise. Captain Gregory, her father's seagoing friend, would run the boat for her. When Nora sprang the contemplated cruise, John waited in silence for Aunt Millicent to speak.

"I hate boats—confined, smelly, uncomfortable places," declared the implacable aunt, "but it might be cooler than staying here. Who shall we have, Nora?"

All arrangements were soon made, even to the menu and destination. John had not said a word but had been doing some rapid thinking instead. On the way home he told Nora that he had a tentative engagement to play golf over the Fourth and if that went through he would not be able to join her party. "But don't let that interfere with your plans," he urged.

"I surely won't," said Nora shortly.

"You don't mind, dear, do you?"

"Suit yourself, John. We'll manage somehow."

They walked on in silence and then Nora remembered that the plumber had not come to fix the leader on the back porch and sent John off to fetch him. As soon as he got out of sight Nora hastened home and telephoned Gabriella. "We're planning a cruise over the Fourth of July." With purpose she used the editorial "we" to include John. Gabriella accepted with alacrity for herself and Bob.

Nora did not tell John that Gabriella was coming. Neither did she question him further about his plans for the Fourth. Two days before the cruise he mentioned casually that the golf party was off and that he was coming with them.

The party sailed Thursday to be gone three days. There were eight of them and the first day out everybody was thinking of everybody else's comfort, with the result that no one spent a moment alone. John took on the responsibilities of host with such enthusiasm and gaiety that Nora gave herself up to a somnolent state of peace. The trip was going to be a restful excursion after all.

The first burst of generous companionship wore itself thin by Friday and by the evening of that day everybody had chosen a partner and settled down to quiet enjoyment. There was a numbing charm in the shifting scenes. The captain hugged the shore to enable the guests to enjoy the fireworks. Night descended with delicious coolness, and bursting rockets began to take form and color against the darkening sky. Little by little conversation ceased and eventually a comfortable silence settled upon deck.

Nora pierced the darkness to see where John was. He and Gabriella were not in sight. She guessed their whereabouts—hidden behind the captain's bridge, sitting silently together, looking out at the sea. They had chosen that particular spot the first night out and after loudly recommending it to the others were glad nevertheless to be left to themselves. All on board were aware of their desire for privacy and tactfully refrained from joining them. Now and then some one cast a surreptitious glance in their direction, trying to satisfy the insatiable curiosity that almost every one has about romance.

NORA stared determinedly ahead of her. She had ached so long that she had reached the point where she no longer cared. At least, that's what she told herself at the moment, as she sat alone, thinking how much she had changed since the first time she had guessed their secret. There was a point of saturation to every emotion, even to jealousy. Her hate had lost its keenness and pain and isolation had given back to her some atoms of her own identity. There was a quality in mere existence—a beauty that at times she could almost get hold of. Once it was captured, she would be safe and independent.

As the night grew older dense darkness enveloped everything and formed a velvety background for the brilliant illuminations. Nora asked the captain to take a course some distance out beyond reach of the fireworks on shore. But as they passed another yacht a rocket came straight for them. It made a white malignant thread of fire, twisting and turning until its poisonous tongue hung directly over the heads of the pair behind the captain's bridge; then it broke into a star and wafted its sparks in blessing upon them. There was a shifting of places and a snuffing out of sparks. Some one remarked about the Star of Bethlehem looking out for lovers and another about Heaven's blessings. Nora's illusion about her new self was shattered. A sudden, impotent misery came blackly upon her. When the joking had stopped and the attention of her guests centered upon more impersonal conversation, she decided to go below. She picked her way out quietly. To reach the stairs she had to circle the captain's bridge and came into full view of the two hiding figures. They were in close embrace and appeared as one.

In the process of mortification Nora's temper had suffered. The white fury that took hold of her was something new and powerful and desperate. Her passion was vibrant. It communicated itself to the others on board and they looked her way. They held their breath when they saw what Nora saw. They watched her. She snatched at a coil of rope that encircled a peg, then, with the frightening noise of one crying in a nightmare, she lashed out at the lovers with all her strength. There was a sharp cry of pain and the pair scrambled to their feet. Nora followed them, crying and lashing out. The captain held the others back and gave her room. In the dark his face beamed with satisfaction. He was devoted to Nora and had watched the amorous gestures of John with a growing itch to throttle him. Finally he switched on the light and took the rope from Nora's trembling hands.

"Put them off," she ordered.

Bob came forward with his nervous laugh that was more like a whimper. He tried to get to Gabriella, but Nora barred the way. In a voice so controlled that it was piercing Nora spoke to them.

"So that's what you call playing the game! It's damn bad taste to play it on this boat. I am going to land you here, Gabriella, and you can take John with you!"

A seaman was lowering the tender.

John wheeled Nora around roughly. "Stop it! You—you—you! I'm through with you! I will never forgive you!"

"John goes with you, Gabriella," called Nora.

"Nonsense! Nora, I'm not getting off. You're a hysterical lunatic. Control yourself!" Gabriella turned to the others and tried to laugh the matter away. "I've never heard of such crude, vulgar jealousy. I've got a nice husband of my own, Nora."

"Bob, get Gabriella's things and yours if you are going with her," ordered Nora.

The tender was lowered and the captain threw Gabriella's suitcase in it. John flew at the captain, who lifted him up and set him down forcibly as if he were an unwieldy bundle of sailings. When John picked himself up, he looked into the muzzle of a gun.

Nora snatched the gun from the captain's hand. "I'll use it if necessary. Now, Gabriella, get a move on!"

Bob had his arm about Gabriella and his anger died in articulate stuttering as he tried to tell John what he thought of him and Nora.

"Daughter of—of—a—a—w-wa-waiter!"

John thrust him aside. "Don't be an ass!"

Gabriella pulled Bob into the tender and turned to John. "You weak fool! Stop that crazy gunwoman!"

Nora waved the gun and her eyes were so wild that Gabriella backed against the swaying side of the boat and sat down without dignity. Aunt Millicent's form hung over the rail and she tittered.

"Push off!" bellowed the captain.

The tender made its way swiftly toward shore and Nora handed the gun to the captain. John escaped below.

And now Aunt Millicent appeared with a bottle in her hand and a box of fig Newtons. Her jubilation was infectious. "Call John, Nora, and let's celebrate the reunion of the Bainbridge clan. Here, Captain Gregory, open this bottle of benedictine. My contribution to the game, Nora. You've knocked us all for a cuckoo! Is that right, Nancy?"

AUNT MILLICENT'S levity snapped Nora out of her heroic mood. She had acted in self-defense, without thought, driven to it by an overwhelming feeling of injury with the result that she had given John away before people who were ready to make an after-dinner story out of the event. Self-righteousness fled. What had been noble now looked dingy and common.

She went below to seek out John and found him crying. He was sitting on one of the bunks, his body bent forward, face buried in hands. She could not bring herself to touch him, to say she was sorry. After all, he had brought it upon himself. She sat down opposite him, pulling at her fingers nervously. He was making no noise but she saw that he was tortured and she could not bear it.

"John! Please, John!"

He looked up; his eyes were bloodshot, his face worked with emotion. "What have we done to each other? Horrible, hateful things! It can't go on!"

"No. We must separate," Nora agreed.

"It's all my fault," said John miserably.

"I won't bother you again, John. I'm sorry now. I'm going away so that we will never hurt each other again."

John sat staring at her with the detached, bleak gaze of a man who is sick of himself. As he looked at Nora he realized intuitively for the first time how different she was from the timid girl he had married, how very much he must have hurt her to have wrought this change. He turned his eyes away with contrition. "Don't go, Nora."

"What can the future hold for us? All the glory is gone from our love forever."

"Don't say that, dear. Take the chance with me over again. I guess that's what marriage means—one chance after another. You will, Nora?"

Her heart was full of thankfulness. She sat with her hands clasped before her. Her eyelids drooped and her lips moved.

"What are you doing, Nora?"

"Praying for our second chance."

A Novel Complete in This Issue

The Caraways

"Conscience Does Make Cowards of Us All," Said Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. Yes, but if a Man Truly Repents, It Will Make Him Brave to Right a Wrong

By George Looms

Illustrations by Harry T. Fisk

ST. PAUL PLACE was once the social center of Goldsboro. But that was thirty-five or forty years ago. There is a bronze fountain in the plaza, a bronze lady rising from a sea-shell and holding a bronze drape behind her in the attitude of a Turkish bath towel. Otherwise she is quite brazen. Her sightless eyes seem a bit bleary—she is by no means a nymph—but when spring and summer roll round and the water drenches her basin, her back is as sleek and smooth as that of any trained seal in vaudeville. Elm trees and oaks and maples fill her basin with twigs so that it sometimes stops up and overflows and the robins and the song sparrows swarm about the place in the checkered sunshine. There is a moist coolness to the smell of the black dirt in the yards with their black iron fences, and moss grows in the chinks of the brick pavements. It is not often that one can find a spot like St. Paul Place in Goldsboro, or in any other American town, that has not succumbed to an invasion of rooming-houses. But in Goldsboro, Central Park abuts St. Paul Place and the neighborhood is still considered desirable.

On the afternoon of the first Saturday in June, there was a conference in the back parlor of Number 743. Three men were sitting about a long walnut table, their heads bent over an architect's plan or drawing. They were large men, past an indefinite middle age; their legs and thighs were thick, their feet solidly placed on the floor. Through two long north windows the light came dimly. Because of the elms in the yard and the wall of the adjoining house, the bright yellow glare of the June sun was estopped of entry and the breeze which wafted the long lace curtains inward was sweet and cool.

It was a quiet, high-ceilinged room, with deep shadows and a pleasant enveloping feel. There was no sound save an occasional scrape of a foot on the carpet, and the rustle of the paper and the gentle fluttering of the curtain in no wise impaired the solid decorum of the place.

Suddenly one of the men cleared his throat, pushed back his chair and stood up. He reached into the inside pocket of his coat.

"Well, after all, that's a mere detail. Now, getting down to brass tacks; here's what I'll start the ball off with." He laid a check down upon the table top and stood back to regard the effect of his action.

Successively the two others picked up the check and looked at it. They pushed back their chairs and looked up at their companion. It was obvious that they were impressed; the action had not been without a touch of the theatrical.

Then the first man threw out his hand in a wide gesture of dismissal and turned and walked over to the mantel. He appeared to be looking at the oil painting on the wall. He was also waiting to hear what the others had to say. But they remained silent.

"Well," he said at length, "I guess that settles the business, eh?" And he turned around.

"Yes, Mr. Brille. That settles it, certainly. It's—it's—well, it's stupendous."

Brille laughed. "Not many men in town put that much out for a public charity, eh?"

The other speaker shook his head.

"Perhaps," said Brille, "I'd better hold this until you get your executive committee; then I can turn it over to them. I merely wanted you to know what I would do. I guess that's about all for this afternoon?" There was an air of great satisfaction in the tone.

Brille was a short, dark man with thick, broad shoulders and an alertness in his body. A casual glance might have led one to believe that he was in his early thirties but he was really twenty years older. He wore a modish, tight-fitting suit of black with a white pin stripe, and his hair, which was parted in the middle, very carefully and smoothly, and which came down low on his forehead, was sleek and oily and black. It was the forehead, the slope of the jaw to the collar, the gathering of meat about the shoulders, that revealed the years. There was a smoldering, unseeing quality in his eyes and a something that might occasionally pass for insolence mixed with a voluntary good humor.

"Who's the picture, Caraway?"

"That? It's the forty-seventh Marquis of Bunk."

BRILLE'S head rose in a flash; he shot an almost imperceptible glance at the speaker and then walked leisurely back to the mantel. "I thought this was your old ancestral home—that you were raised here?"

"No," said Caraway. "It belonged originally to Charlie Meredith. I bought it from his estate. I moved here twenty years ago from Illyria."

"I see. Well, doctor, I guess we've done a pretty good afternoon's work? If one was to believe all that some people say, I suppose I ought to go home and take a dose of strychnine and iron? One hundred thousand—more than the little tinhorns ever have seen together in one place in all their lives, eh? But I'm glad to do it. And you gentlemen can go to your committee and tell 'em what sort of a start you've made. Nothing more, I suppose?"

Caraway rose to his feet. "It's pretty much of a knock-out, Brille. The rest of us were planning to come in and do what we could, but I guess you'll make us look like pikers all right. When Poteet, here, and I had you come around this afternoon we didn't expect anything like this."

"Well," said Brille, "I've never been what might be termed a religious man. I don't care much for all this theological discussion. But the human side of it—that's different. And I've always had my mind set on endowing a hospital or some sort of institution to allay human suffering. I'm glad to do it."

Poteet had seemingly gone into a trance.

"These plans of Bancroft's," said Brille, suddenly coming out of his smiling reflection; "I'm not saying they're to be adopted verbatim. Now, this front elevation—" The three bent over the table again.

As they stood side by side with their backs to the door a grizzled old darky entered and stood watching them. "Genmun's cah," he said as Caraway turned and spied him.

"Tell him to wait, George," said Brille. He moved over toward the door. "By the way, Poteet, I see that that chap Byfield is causing a big stir with his new theology. How do you stand on the business?"

Poteet flushed rosily. They were all standing in the center of the room.

"What did you think of the story we ran last week—first page?"

Poteet looked away for a moment; Caraway stood with one hand on the table, watching him. "Why, in my opinion Byfield's a coward! When he was ordained he knew what the church believed. If he finds he no longer agrees he should be able to find plenty to do outside. Let him give up his pastorate. The creeds are established." His face set in austere lines and he pursed his lips and Brille nodded his head slowly. "It's a wealthy parish. He wants to eat his cake and have it, too. I say, if he hasn't the manhood to give up the material comfort of such a parish, then let him keep his mouth shut."

Brille thought a moment, leaned back and gazed off at the ceiling. Pleasure still lurked in his eyes. "That's right, Poteet. Give some of these chaps an inch and they'll take a yard. What's to become of all our American institutions if we let any little whippersnapper sling mud and scorn at them? . . . By the way, Caraway, is that your boy that's working for the *Clarion?*"

"Yes," said Caraway.

Brille chuckled. The gleaming light still lingered in his eyes. He was obviously master of his world. "Why don't you make him go to work for a real newspaper? Send him down to me. It's like we said, Poteet: those boys are just playing a little toy game. They don't know the value of things. They don't appreciate the value of order in a community; they'd tear it down because some little detail irritates their sense of propriety. I—a—send him down to me, Caraway."

"You'll have to send for him yourself. He's running his own machinery. All these youngsters are these days." They were all walking slowly down the hall.

"I understand he's just come home. Has he had any experience in the game?"

"Four weeks."

"Oh, well! It's not too late then. Better send him down. Doctor, can I take you home?"

They were crossing the threshold; Brille's car stood at the curb, its bonnet gleaming in the sun.

"Thank you, no, Mr. Brille. But before you go I want to tell you that your generosity is magnificent. I—"

"That's all right, doctor."

POTEET and Caraway walked back into the sitting-room. On the table Bancroft's drawing curled up its edges. There was a repressed stillness in the room. Caraway sat down in an armchair and Poteet leaned against the edge of the table; for several minutes they remained thus, silently looking at each other. Then Poteet spoke.

"I don't know. Of course, it solves the business. But I don't like to do it."

"Don't like to do what?"

"I've never had it put up to me as definitely before—but there are certain enterprises where there's no place for tainted money. In a way I'm sorry you did it, John."

"Pooh! That's all bushwa. Sounds like a kid debating in a high school. Money's money. Get it if you can. Brille's harmless—just a wind bag. A little bit soiled, but he wants to police himself up, as they say in the army. All that stuff is just folklore. A man's reputation is the product of so many diverse winds: if you just leave it in a public place it'll collect all sorts of sediment."

"I think not, in this case. It's what he stands for here. It's pretty well established he got his start with blackmail. There was old Richardson and Richardson's wife—and that Jew Greenwalt. That's Greenwalt's house he's living in. They say Greenwalt's son cost him that. A chorus girl, I think. Oh, you know the stories that go around town."

"Hah! Folklore."

"Perhaps. But it goes against the grain to be beholden to that sort of a tradition for our hospital. I was bowled over at the check he had made out. I don't understand it yet, if he's the close-fisted man people say he is."

"Quit worrying. You'll get your institution and he'll get his whitewash—and the advertising. He'll put on an advertising campaign—stick up the rates and get it all back in a couple of months. Don't you think he won't. Hah! Just watch the *Ledger* tomorrow. Another head in the hall of saviors. Washington and Lincoln and Brille. Maybe Jesus Christ if the editorial writer is on his toes. Too bad they can't get a group of photographs for the front page."

"I've half a mind to turn it down."

"You will not. Take it and run, if you've got any sense."

Poteet shook his head. "It takes all the joy out of it somehow, but I don't suppose we can help it. Well, thank you, anyhow."

"It's all right. Drop in again." Caraway stood in the doorway and watched Poteet go down the hall, out into the waning June sunshine.

Since that time when he and Poteet had been young men in Illyria, he had felt a brotherly interest in the man. True, Poteet was too scrupulous about many things—this matter of the hospital fund was but an example—nevertheless, he had always admired the man. Had he not, certainly he would never have brought him to Goldsboro after he had become an imposing figure in the lumber business, and through his influence with the proper authorities, established him and his motherless daughter Alma in St. Paul's rectory. Slowly he came back into the room and pulled around the leather chair so that it faced the windows. Absorbed in thought, he sat down, sat with his body hunched forward and staring into the fireplace. For a long time he sat thus, and gradually the lines deepened between his brows and a somber glow came into his eyes.

MILTON CARAWAY looked at his watch. It was not an obvious gesture; the thumb of his right hand was already in convenient position over the edge of his waistcoat pocket. One could not be brazen about such things. "It is our great shame today," thundered the Reverend Mr. Poteet, and Milton slipped the watch back into the pocket and straightened in his seat. Perhaps he had been lolling a little. Through the swiveled panels of the great south window he could see the interweaving of tree-tops, with that indescribable fresh green of new foliage after rain, and with a limitless depth. A shaft of warm sunlight streamed through and lay cheerily upon the coifed head of the Virgin of the baptismal font.

The voice paused and Milton looked again toward the pulpit. The Reverend Mr. Poteet was making one of his personal appeals: he leaned across the railing in his earnestness, his eyes narrowed, the line of his mouth a grim slit. It was the attitude of a man listening. Then suddenly he straightened up and smiled—a bitter, disillusioned sort of smile. "If," he said, "the church be not divine—of what use is my worship—your worship—anybody's worship?" Here he made good use of dramatic pause. " 'Upon this rock, Peter, I have built my church!' Could anything be plainer? It was a personal charge."

The watch had said twelve-twenty; the sermon would be nearing its climax now.

Suddenly Mr. Poteet leaned forward and pointed his finger, and there was a slight stir in the nave. "The church is God's holy institution; her service is by His direct authority. We must daily recognize this truth and partake of her holy benefits if we would be true members incorporate of the mystical body—" Milton was wondering idly in what sacerdotal equipment the divine authority was supposed to rest: whether in the Ark of the Covenant—no, that was Jewish—or in the golden crucifix of the altar or in the white stole of the Reverend Mr. Poteet. There was a hideous crash. A little girl in the adjoining pew had dropped the prayer bench upon the tiled floor, and her parents were stooping over to shield her and at the same time prevent a repetition of the commotion.

The little girl—she wore a white, frilly dress with a blue-ribbon sash and a Princess bonnet—seemed a bit bewildered by the sudden publicity her act had given her, and her eyes were as round and dark as a frightened rabbit's. But she was accepting the consequences with a certain dignity which was delightful to Milton. Then suddenly the congregation was rising, the priest was blessing his people, and the moral crop had been sown for another week.

A few minutes later they were filing down the aisle; the organ was chanting a pæan of thanksgiving and there was that immediate buzz of relaxation that follows the conclusion of a church service. Faces were shining; there was a pleasant hum of whispered greetings, the rustle of silken garments.

Milton was swept slowly along in the gentle tide toward the door. He could see the Reverend Mr. Poteet in his purple cassock in the center of a mild maelstrom, nodding and bowing in all directions, smiling here, scowling there in a quick access to the needs of the moment, reaching out a hand over intervening shoulders to receive a greeting. It was a pleasant sight.

The crowd carried him a little to one side, and just as he was on a line with the rector he was held in a sort of eddy or backwater for a moment. He caught the latter's eye across the intervening backs, and bowed. Mr. Poteet acknowledged the greeting with a momentary lifting of the eyebrows and a pursing of the lips: it was a symbol of intimacy. Milton passed on without further ceremony.

FIFTEEN minutes later he was walking along St. Paul Place. The wind was sending the spray from the fountain of the bronze bather in an iridescent sheet and tiny drops struck him on the face—delightfully cool. Just then two people paused at a gate up ahead—a man and a girl. The girl waved her hand at him.

"Where've you been? Come get your bathing suit and go with us. The bunch is going to Stacey's Lake."

"Sorry. I can't. Come on in, won't you?"

He held the gate open for them. The girl was a slender creature with a slouch in her shoulders. She wore a felt hat of a sort of bird's-egg mottle with a feather that swung around in a rakish swoop to the front. One corner of the hat partly covered one eye so that she had to tilt back her head to see. She stood with her hands on her hips, with her jacket thrown open, and it was obvious that corsets were not on her yearly budget for clothes. "Oh, we can't come in! It's too late. Lonny and I were wondering if you might not run us out in your car?"

Milton looked at her dreamily. There was a chicness in her general outline. She threw her arms about in a certain unstudied grace. And there was a gleam in her eyes as she glanced at him as if she included him in the innermost privacy of her thoughts. The warm wind pressed her skirts back upon her so that her figure stood frankly revealed; it seemed impossible that her clothing could have consisted of more than one layer—a cool, girlish form. But there was something unpleasant about her: her front teeth protruded a little; her under lip had an appreciable sag and was much too moist.

"I haven't any bathing suit."

"'Sno matter. You've still got your heavenly smile."

The young man guffawed.

"Tell me what you want me to do," Milton said.

"Oh, just go out to Stacey's Lake. There's a crowd goes every Sunday. Started last Sunday. They're all the right people. There's a clubhouse or something up on the hill and you can get something. Lovely view if you like views. You've been out, haven't you, Lonny?"

"No," said Lonny. "I've heard of the place."

"Well," said Milton, "you'll have to count me out. I'm through splashing round in a muddy hole and drying myself on a newspaper. When one reaches my age he no longer searches out opportunities for supreme discomfort. Sorry. But don't let me frost your party."

There was reluctance in Lily's movement, but no resentment in her weary young face. She slipped her arm about Lonny's waist and leaned heavily against him. "My bet is, you're a genuine old crab, Milton Caraway." She launched herself precipitately down the steps and stood for a minute squinting up at him in the sun.

"Perhaps. Well—over the river!"

They turned and went down the walk and Milton entered the house.

He sat in the big leather chair and stared out of the window into the cool area between the houses. The blank white wall of the house next door was spotted here and there with ancient rain streaks. He had played ball against that wall years ago; the memory of it drifted lazily through his mind. He sat with his chin on his hands in a leisurely study. His head was shapely: fine, youthful high forehead topped with a crest of curly brown hair that left his temples bare. His nose had the slightest aquiline slant, and there was something patrician in his narrow face, an uncertain wistfulness about his mouth. Older women—mothers as a rule—felt a tightening about the heart when they saw him for the first time. Suddenly he raised his head and laughed shortly. Then he rose to his feet and walked over to the table. At that moment steps sounded in the hall, solid, deliberate steps. He paused and listened. The door opened and John Caraway came into the room.

"Been here long?"

"No."

"Mrs. Snively know you've come?"

"I don't know. I'll tell her."

When he returned Caraway looked up at him mildly.

"Have a good morning?" he inquired after a little.

"Went to church. Dr. Poteet announced that the new Episcopal hospital was a certainty now."

THE older man said nothing. He sat down, and Milton stood by one of the open windows while the curtain blew gently back and wrapped about his legs. The elder man was regarding the younger intently from under level brows.

"That all?"

"Oh, he said some other things about it, but I didn't notice particularly. He made some reference to that fundamentalism scrap they're having in New York. He makes it clear where he stands, all right."

"H'm!"

At this juncture voices could be heard in the hall, and in a moment the darky appeared at the door, held it open, and Lonny Cox came in. Caraway, who had turned in his chair to see, cleared his throat and slowly rose to his feet.

"Father, you've met Mr. Cox? Lonsford Cox—son of Mr. James Cox. He's going to have dinner with us."

"Glad to have him. . . . Sit down. . . . George!"

He called the old darky to him and had a whispered conversation while the black man's head nodded gravely up and down.

George left the room and the three men sat in silence. Cox seemed to be struggling with an ill-suppressed amusement which did not entirely escape the elder Caraway's notice; he sat in a narrow, straight-backed chair and plucked at his trouser creases with nervous fingers. Every now and then he would gaze off into space and smile. When Caraway leaned over and took the newspaper from the table, Cox turned to Milton and spoke in a low tone:

"I think she's wise."

Milton had been miles away in his thoughts. "What's that?"

"I stopped at the drug store on the corner of Fourth and Zane; said I had to telephone. But she came in with me. I had the hardest kind of time—had to walk four blocks out of my way. She never wants to go home. I think she suspected that I was coming back here."

Milton was no longer listening; instead, he was watching his father. "There's something about the controversy on page four," he said. "The governor and I were speaking about the latest church schism in New York," he added, turning to Lonny.

"Aw, yes!" rejoined Lonny.

"It's sort of pathetic hearing these poor old beggars wasting their breath on all that stuff. How they do cling to their old shrines and altars!"

Mr. Caraway dropped his paper. His graying hair, brushed back from his forehead, clung damply; the bags under his eyes were heavy and dark—a somber face. As he sat with the line of his jaw heavy and relaxed, with one hairy hand resting on his knee, there was a look in his face of having peered into forbidden things. The others waited on him in silence. When he spoke it was with a sort of rapt earnestness:

"All that is just talk—just talk. What does it matter? We were sent into this world to work—to build. You show me the buildings of a nation and I'll tell you the degree of its civilization." His eyes, fitfully moving, rested for a moment upon Lonny Cox. "The greatest contribution ever made to the world is the contribution of America—or it was, before everybody got to jabbering about all this rationalism, all these isms and ologies. Who cares? While we're here, let's work and forget it. Make the place a little more livable."

MILTON glanced at Lonny, who, head bent, apparently was receiving the entire brunt of the condemnation. He was amused. He glanced at his father and then at the ceiling.

"Yes," he said. "I don't know but what you're right—certainly for the rank and file. But personally I see no harm in the few with brains to go adventuring into the realms of the speculative. I'd like to know what it's all about if possible. Perhaps it *was* meant for us to reach the heights as they say in the newspapers."

Caraway snorted. "You're no better than the life you lead. All the thinking and speculating in the world will never make any difference."

The door opened and George came in bearing a tray with three glasses, a bottle of Scotch, and a siphon. Lonny Cox looked up. His face brightened.

"Here's where I shine," he said. "I agree with Mr. Caraway. What's the odds? By their works ye shall know them. The lad who canned the stuff in that bottle was a good workman."

Caraway was on his feet. He opened the bottle while George fussed around in the background, rubbing his hands together. "I got in a case of this last week," he said. "Somebody's getting rich between here and the border. *That's* something Congress has done of a constructive nature—made a few fortunes."

"I'll say!" said Lonny, filling up his glass. "All power to 'em. Somehow it tastes better now than it ever used to."

"How do you get that way, Cox?" said Milton. "When they outlawed this stuff you were still getting yours out of a milk bottle."

"Just the same, you'll remember I was a bottle baby."

They stood up, each holding his drink. And then silently, with one accord, they touched their lips to the brims. Rationalism and the theory of the builder had fled. Reflectively and with exaggerated care they set their glasses back upon the tray and stood in silent contemplation of each other.

George came to the doorway. His eyes sought his master's.

"Ready, George? Well, come, young men. This establishment does not tolerate tardiness at meals. Mrs. Snively would leave me in a week, I imagine. We're old-fashioned here, Mr. Cox."

"Finest way to be. I like the old-fashioned orders. We were talking about you the other night, Mr. Caraway. My father said it was men like you that made a community." Thus pleasantly conversing, they passed through the door on the way to the dining table.

THE Women's Club of Goldsboro was holding its final cultural orgy. The hall, which was at the top of an incredibly high flight of winding stairs, was so jammed in between adjoining buildings that sunlight had never penetrated into its depths. There was quite a pitch to the floor and a shallow balcony hung over it, giving the place a lowering look. About a hundred ladies were gazing in rapt, white-faced attention at the stage. Madame President was opening the meeting, her hands primly clasped before her. She wore a satin dress of pale blue, and her broad-brimmed hat, cast at the slightest angle, sported a drooping ostrich feather. Her eyes shone.

"We have, when you consider the program of the past season, gone a long way. From this platform we have heard all about the plays of England and America. Some of the most brilliant minds have spoken on literature; we have learned all about Russian books and the poetry—poetry no longer is dependent on the well-known forms, as you all know."

She paused and smiled in a sweet vagueness, and she turned her head slowly from side to side. Before her stretched in rows those blank, expressionless white faces. Because of the intense glare of the footlights in their tin trough it was impossible to attain that concentration of gaze one can achieve in a less formal place. In the pause Madame President's thoughts were acquiring a slight order out of their chaos. A brilliant, mischievous smile flashed across her face and she half turned her body.

"Now, this afternoon"—she lingered on the word—"this afternoon we are going to have the piéce de résistance." She paused again, raised her hand so that the fingers drooped gracefully, and glanced over her shoulder. "We are going to have music."

Three young men in dress suits, who had been sitting in tepid misery in three of the narrowest and straightest chairs that ever graced a women's club, smiled wanly and stirred.

"Mr. William Bonesteel, Mr. Aloysius Craft, and Mr. Herman Eichelberg. These gentlemen who have so kindly consented to entertain us this afternoon have their business engagements to take care of and they have asked to be put on the program *first*. So we will hear them first, ladies. And last—but not least"—here she shot a very arch look over her shoulder at so precarious an angle that she seemed to be on the point of exceeding the capacities of equilibrium—"but not least—by no means—we have Mr. Milton Caraway. Mr. Caraway, you will all recognize as the brilliant young theater critic on the Goldsboro *Clarion*. He will tell us what to expect of the theater."

Madame President cleared her throat and smoothed the sleek front of her blue satin. A patter of hand-clapping arose far back in the darkened auditorium. The door opened and two tardy ladies entered; they crept down the aisle in a sibilant and groping search. Madame President politely waited until they had seated themselves.

"And now we should like to hear the secretary read the minutes of the last meeting."

Milton looked at his watch as Madame Secretary came briskly forward from the wings. It said five minutes past three. Madame Secretary fluttered her notebook, lost her place, found it again, began to read, found that she was reading from the wrong page and then began to flutter the pages once more. In another moment she was launched. Unfortunately it appeared the minutes had not been read for the last four meetings. That, of course, was a most unhappy state of affairs. With the ladies' permission she would read all the back minutes. She did, with proper emphasis and feeling.

When at last her duty had been fully performed she paused for breath. Milton looked at his watch again. The Women's Club of Goldsboro was forty-five minutes nearer eternity than when Madame Secretary began. The Women's Club of Goldsboro did not bow the knee to undignified haste. Before the secretary felt called upon to yield her position she had told the ladies all about three poor families of wife-deserters and a nest of rosy children whose mother, a lecherous jade, had abandoned them for the caresses of an unmoral tinsmith. This catalogue of misfortune, leading from one thing to another, was followed by a note of thanks from the family of a Mrs. Shanks for a floral design, and a bid from a speciality company for ridding the club kitchen of roaches. It was finally suggested that Madame Treasurer had some matter of importance to broach and Madame Secretary left the stage with supreme reluctance.

By some rare good fortune it was found that Madame Treasurer was not present. Madame Chairman was thus faced by a serious breach in the procedure, but things got under way again when a Mrs. Byles asked for the floor and got it readily and then valiantly attacked the indolence and indifference of the members in supporting the doll bazaar. Milton, gazing upward at the grimy skylight, wondered idly if clouds had come to obscure the earth. From below it seemed that the skylight shut off a cold and cruel sky from which poor little birds might fall, frozen, upon a barren and empty world. He no longer heard the sweet-voiced protests and enthusiasms of the lady speakers.

In a daze he heard the names of the musicians being pronounced. One by one the young men stepped forward. One was to sing, another carried a violin, the third seated himself at the piano. Milton looked at his watch. It was four-thirty and the meeting was a success.

FOR a long time there was music. First, all three artists performed together. Milton failed to catch the title of the first number but it was something about "we two a-Maying," lugubrious but sweet. Mr. Bonesteel followed this with "Many Brave Souls Lie Asleep in the Deep." Somehow the sting of death seemed lessened. Then came "The Bells." The audience stirred in its seats when he left the stage for good. In the second number Mr. Craft accompanied with a violin obligato in which he occasionally got off key, and once he lost his place but without materially altering the general effect of the ensemble.

Came Mr. Herman Eichelberger. He was brisk if he was meager. His neck was small and his collar was large. His long blond hair swept back from his forehead from a widow's peak and when he got up steam it all came down across his face, completely and chastely veiling it. Pince-nez sat upon the bridge of his nose, gleaming, uncomfortable pince-nez, and the starched front of his stiff dress shirt had the glaze of a plate-glass window. His voice was fine and deep and it caused a stir when he announced from the piano stool that his maternal grandaunt had taken lessons of Chopin and that he was giving lessons out on Quitman Street—had just opened a nice little studio. He was to play Liszt's Rhapsodies—did any one have a preference? If not, then he'd risk the Fifth. He was just about to start when it occurred to him that this opus might be clarified by a verbal preface and when finally he opened up a murderous assault upon the keys there was a dumb quiet in the hall. He played with a fine vigor and haste, was not finicking about the minor details of the symphony. His encores were quiet, studious atmospheric bits.

Mr. Craft, who played the violin, was obviously an amateur. During his first solo number three ladies were seen to creep quietly up the aisle and out to a crass existence. He went from number one into number two almost without pause and then realized the oversight and modestly announced the titles and subheads of the pieces which he had just played. His applause was not warming and he appeared a bit vague about things when he went into his encore: Kreisler's Caprice Viennois. He should not have attempted it, for he forgot it right in the midriff, and there was a long, gaunt, saw-toothed pause while Mr. Eichelberger tee-tum-tee-tummed helpfully in a sort of mid-season vamp. When he bowed and withdrew, crimson and breathless, Madame Chairman again assumed the center of the stage, a repressed expression of mixed emotion on her face, and announced gently that Mr. Craft was the youngest professional violinist in Goldsboro and that he could be obtained at times to play in private musicals and entertainments and it was nice of him to have given his time and talents this afternoon gratis.

There came a long pause. One could hear the slight noises in the hall, the cautious moving of feet, the distant slam of a door. An old lady in the front row was yawning cavernously. In the pause four ladies got up and left and Madame President paused until they had closed the door behind them.

"And now," she said, "comes the treat of the meeting. I'm afraid we've kept Mr. Caraway waiting a pretty long time, but the musicians asked to be excused as soon as possible." The rascally fellows were still lolling about in the wings smoking comfortable cigarettes, and the soft hum of their voices could be heard in the pauses of Madame Chairman's speech. "Ladies of the Goldsboro Women's Club! You have all been reading with the greatest interest the brilliant reviews and criticisms of Mr. Milton Caraway, published in the Goldsboro *Clarion*."

She looked over her shoulder, and the smile she wore might have become an angel from heaven bearing a cup to the thirsty damned. It enveloped Milton from head to foot, stuck to him like treacle, stripped him stark naked of all human reserve.

"Mr. Caraway, ladies of the Women's Club of Goldsboro, has most kindly consented to tell us something about dramatic criticism. He is going to give away some of his deepest secrets." This most coyly. "I'm sure we will all profit extremely by what he has to say."

She turned and held out her hand in a pleasant gesture of invitation. She smiled up at him through her lashes; in the smile there was regret that her youth had fled and that his remained.

Milton bowed to her as he passed. He walked up to the footlights, whose glare was blinding. Across them he could see the faces, indefinite, expressionless blobs of white. He walked easily and, taking up his stand in the center of the stage, he casually pulled out his watch. He looked at it, paused, and returned it to his pocket, and as he did so he could hear the whisperings of the musical trio back in the wings.

He lifted his head and stared off at the balcony rail.

"It's getting late," he said. "Most of you will be wanting to go home for supper." He cleared his throat and looked off in another direction. "What I've got to say, most of you may have heard before; or else you know about it without my telling you. If you like a play, it's a good play. If you don't like it, it's a bad one. It's very simple. That's the innermost secret of play reviewing. And now, as I have nothing to advertise and as it is nearly half-past five, I'll bring my remarks to a close. It has been a great honor to be with you this afternoon."

He turned and walked back across the stage. As he passed Mrs. Martin, the chairman, he caught a deeply reproachful look in her eyes. Mrs. Martin's eyes were big and brown and expressive; she had reduced Mr. Martin to a babbling insanity with them twenty-three years before. Her mouth was set in the smile all chairmen of the Women's Club of Goldsboro had to possess, without which the chairmanship were impossible. He bowed to her gravely, made his way down the stage steps and out into the auditorium. As he left the hall he could hear her conducting the adjournment—likewise a complicated and difficult matter.

AS HE walked along, the slanting sunlight was gilding the topmost branches of the chestnut trees. At Broadway he had left the crowd; the street here was quiet; the houses sitting far back in the yards were basking in the warm and dusty haze. There was a soft luminance in the air. At the foot of a lilac bush there was a waste of purple pollen; a crimson rambler on a side porch was bursting into bloom. Birds dropped from the high trees into the grass, and the air was full of their twitterings. It was the ninth of June.

The pavement before him as he walked was barred by the shadows of a picket fence; the interstices between took on a shade of molten gold, and overhead, past the green of the tree-tops was the pale blue of an evening sky. About half a block distant a girl was walking toward him. She was wearing a dark brown cloak, flung wide and hanging gracefully from her arms. The soft folds of her dress, which was a lighter shade of tan, enveloped her slender form with a classic sort of beauty. He watched the movement of her limbs as she approached; the draperies clothed and yet ravishingly revealed a long-limbed supple sureness that was neither slim nor rounded. For just a moment, as the sun flashed across the lawn and the breeze pressed back her skirts upon her, she might have been some clean-limbed handmaid of Diana moving through a stately glade. Milton's eyes did not for a moment leave her. As he watched and as they approached the nearer, a sudden light of uncertain surprise came into his face and he raised his hand above his head.

"Ho!" he called as she turned in at the gate. "Wait there, will you?"

She paused with one hand on the fence. She was a grave, slender girl, with a beautiful mouth and blue eyes that had, as they say, been rubbed in with smudgy fingers. There was a transparent pallor in her cheek and a slight languor in her movements which suggested a voluntary repose rather than a chronic state.

Milton drew near; there was a dancing light in his eyes and he was twirling his hat on a finger. "How come the disguise?"

"Disguise?" The voice was low-pitched, quiet, with a slight ringing note, and as she spoke a flush came into her cheeks.

"Surely. Didn't know you half a block off. Not bad! Not half bad!"

"Glad you like it." She turned negligently away and looked up at the house.

"Well, going to ask me in? I'm all worn out and everything."

"Why, yes, if you like! But you can't stay long. Or at least, I'll have to go up and dress in a very little while."

He followed her up the walk to the porch. "You women are funny creatures," he said.

They sat down in a porch swing which left their feet dangling, and Milton opened a case and took out a cigarette which he lighted with grave deliberation. When he turned toward her she was sitting in the corner, facing him with her chin lowered, and there was a trace of a smile hovering about her mouth. As she caught his eye she looked away again, began to finger the fringe of her cape.

He did not speak, merely sat and watched her and let the blue smoke curl comfortably about his head. Behind him was a side yard, a vastly extravagant side yard of fifty feet or more with a tangle of bushes, an ancient arbor, and a narrow strip of flower beds dividing the lawn from the jungle. The air was heavy with lilac; little birds were scolding and every now and then restlessly stirring up in little flurries. A lawn sprinkler twirled lazily, flipping the water drops far and wide.

"Well?"

"Well?"

"When do I get another date?"

"I don't know. I haven't decided." She was looking at him levelly.

"I haven't seen you for years. Old homestead's all grown up with underbrush."

"What do you call what you're doing now? And that is not underbrush. It's shrubbery."

He blew a smoke ring. "I've just been making myself famous, and here you puncture my little balloon. What's the big idea, making me wait and form in line behind all this home talent?"

"You're not as sorry for yourself as you sound. How long have you been home now?"

"Two months and thirteen days."

"And have you figured up how many times you have sat on this porch in that time?"

"No. Have you?"

She lowered her gaze to her lap. "This makes the thirty-third time. Father will be making you pay parking charges."

"I'm glad you've kept track. It doesn't seem so much to me."

THEY sat staring off across the lawn. By degrees the sunlight grew softer, the shadows where the sparrows were picking in the grass longer and deeper.

Over the tree-tops came the sound of the evening whistles, their harshness softened by the distance and the quiet of the world.

"What were you doing of such vast importance this afternoon?"

"What? Oh, the Women's Club invited me to speak on uplift—cultural uplift. What is today? The ninth or tenth?"

"What did you tell them?"

"Little as possible. Never tell a woman anything. Just about this time, or I guess it will be on toward the end of the week, all the studes will be drifting in for reunion. Gosh!"

"Don't let me keep you if you want to go."

"Hunh? Oh! Don't mind about that. It's all decided. Goldsboro wins this year."

"Well, that's nice."

"I was just thinking"—he had not heard her—"what a pity it is to waste all this loveliness, all the beauty in life, the way some people do. I've been back in this country two months and—what is it—thirteen days. And it seems to me more than ever that people are constantly trying to dodge all of life that they can. Why, this afternoon that lot of women were just tickled to death to sit up there in a smelly old hall and listen to each other bore each other to death. Just to keep from having an afternoon to themselves when they could think about things and find out what some of it is all about."

"You believe, then, in being somewhat alone, I take it."

"Yes, some. But not too much." He grinned and slipped his arm along the back of the seat.

She reached up and pushed it off. "You may take that away. I'll not fall out."

"Do you know, when I think about it—what's the use of all this milling around just because everybody else does it? I wonder how many people ask themselves that question." He looked up and off beyond the tree-tops. In a sky of palest azure floated the moon. And there was a mist that seemed to rise from the chimney-tops, pale translucent—perhaps the fairy folk that inhabit cities embarking on nocturnal adventure.

Alma's face was grave; her eyes rested on him for a brief instant, thoughtfully, and then she raised her head and she too stared at the moon that hung above the tree-tops.

"You do. That's the reason—or one of the reasons—why you've seen me sitting on this porch thirty-three times this last two months."

Alma laughed. Her throat was slender and white as she held back her head and laughed. In the midst of the confusion a man had come up the walk and was stepping on to the porch.

"How do you do, Dr. Poteet?" Milton arose hastily.

"Milton, how are you? Daughter, remember supper's at six-thirty." He bowed and passed on into the house.

For a moment silence reigned again on the front porch. Milton flicked his cigarette over into the grass. The swing moved slowly to and fro.

He turned suddenly and took her hand. "Alma—life is a beautiful, beautiful thing if you let it be. I—a—you're one of the very beautiful things in the world—to me. It's not the way your face looks, but it's something that's back in your eyes—"

She said nothing, sat looking at him.

"Well, it's time I left. The doctor gave out the last word, didn't he? When am I going to see you again?"

"I've nothing to do tonight."

THEY were standing near the porch column in the graying light, he a step lower than the girl. "I'm sorry—I've got to work tonight. Gee! I wonder if I mightn't —No, I can't. Tomorrow night? Sometime soon?"

"I don't know. Call me up."

He stood for a moment and looked up into her face, the thought of all future arrangement seemingly fled. Then he turned and swung one foot and dropped lightly to the grass. "I've an idea that your father, the eminent divine, does not regard my suit with favor."

"What makes you think that?"

"Oh, a good many things. He never carries around any fireworks to speak of that he can set off whenever he sees me here. And then again he has never availed himself of the opportunity of talking with me on the significant facts of life—on the meaning of the universe." He grinned up at her.

"Oh, Dad's that way with everybody. He keeps his ideas to himself—except what he's paid to spread from the pulpit.

Chances are, he wouldn't agree with you much anyway."

"No, I suppose not. But there's one thing we're agreed on, I'm pretty sure."

"What's that?"

"I'll tell you tomorrow night."

"Not tomorrow. I've a date."

"Break it."

"No."

"I don't see why."

"Don't you? How about *your* business and tonight?"

"Oh, that's different! Well, soon. Day after tomorrow?" He went down the walk to the gate.

"Perhaps."

The gate made vigorous protest in its rusty old hinges as he pulled it open. And in the tree overhead a bird began to chirp drowsily at the sound. There was a soft grayness in the air and the supper lights were glowing in the windows. Under the low branches of the maples he turned to go, casting a look back over his shoulder at the girl. She stood mistily indistinct, leaning against the porch column, the white of her collar and cuffs in vague contrast with the shadow of her form. She raised her hand to him—held it forward a moment. And then she turned and disappeared in the blackness of the doorway.

WHEN Milton reached the Orpheum that night the crowd was already gathering. From across the street he watched it—humanity losing itself. Girls were coming bareheaded, the backs of their necks showing gaunt and pitiful under mops of hair. There were broad red faces ashine with a simple joy for which he felt no sympathy. Somehow, it was an empty feeling, watching this other world, a world with desires so shallow that he could not compass them or catch the light therein: every man and woman a riddle; there was never any telling what went on behind those faces—forever a hidden and paltry secret, so different from the thing that was in his heart.

His gorge suddenly rose. He could not go into the theater with them, watch them give themselves over to the anesthesia of the moment, anesthesia from a drug which had no potency for him. He took a ticket from his pocket, looked at it, and then dropped it unostentatiously at the feet of a gaping newsboy. The boy did not notice it. Milton moved away. Perhaps the oafish youngster, flaming with inchoate desire, might never find the treasure at his feet: Fate might be saving it for another—might even be fashioning a destiny of waste for that scrap of cardboard. He was still standing there gaping as Milton turned the corner of the street and passed out of sight.

Milton came to an alley and picked his way among the puddles until he came to an iron fire-door painted yellow. This he opened and entered. Then there was a little hallway with benches along the wall which were supposed to accommodate visitors. The esoteric business of backstage was shielded by another door. This second door, too, Milton pushed open without hesitation. Before him stood the flies.

With one hand on an electric switch a man in shirt-sleeves was talking to a short little woman in a tarlatan skirt and white tights. She was trying to straighten the shoulder strap of her bodice and her features under the scarlet paint were dull and lifeless. A little girl of five or six came dancing around the corner of a back drop, carrying a big doll with golden hair. A curious, ghostly little figure she looked, dancing there in the gray light with the whitewashed wall of the theater behind her and the black depths of the roof above. She came toward them, still skipping, still pirouetting, until she paused by the couple in the wings. The man put out a hand and touched her on the head, the woman giving her but a passing glance.

"Lookee, Mamma." She squatted on the floor with her darling. "Rosy can do the splits, too."

Just then a buzzer sounded, a little red light flashed on the board and the sound of the orchestra came floating in as the curtain rose. The woman pushed the child aside, the electrician moved a switch, and the show was on.

It was not the first time that Milton had viewed an Orpheum bill from the wings. But never before had it seemed to be such obvious mummery. The woman in the tights and tarlatan skirt was a bicycle rider; she balanced upon a precarious saddle perched high above a single wheel. A man came darting out from the opposite wings and together they waltzed the "Merry Widow." At their exits, immediately upon reaching the shelter of the wings,

"To hear you talk, J. C., I might think you stood in with Brille, if I didn't know better."

the syrupy smiles which they wore on the stage would be wiped off as if by magic and their very bodies would slump into attitudes of supreme indifference and boredom.

Following the bicyclists came a song-and-dance act. A young Jew who talked out of the corner of his mouth and greased his hair with oil took the part of a modern masher and followed his partner about the stage. The latter was a yellow-haired girl with sullen eyes and a pair of marvelous legs efficiently displayed. There was a patter of the popular slang, some conventional remarks to the effect that the last girl who had gone riding with him had walked home—in fact, the seventh commandment was set up as a hurdle and humanity as a stream of gum-shoed hunters who loved their work. Suddenly the pair digressed into some agile dance steps that brought the perspiration out in streams. As they crowded off the stage the man turned to the woman and snarled across his shoulder, "Ya didn't mend them pants like I told ya," and the curtain was rising again.

While the next pair was striving for the attention of the audience with a bit of mountain-climbing foolery in which the scenery represented Mont Blanc, and while clouds of scrap paper descended upon their heads, some one brushed Milton's shoulder. "I beg your pardon," said a rich voice, and Milton turned to see a woman muffled to the chin in a blue-velvet wrap come crowding past him.

She took her position in the wings and he could see her indistinctly in the reflection from the stage. She was evidently waiting her turn, and he caught a quick glance at his program to see who she might be.

"Ledoux," was all the program said.

He turned again to the pair on the mountain-top; the man was on the point of pushing his lady into a three-thousand-foot chasm and laughter could be heard from the audience. The woman in the cloak shifted her weight from one foot to the other. She had gorgeous black hair, parted in the middle and coiled at the back of her neck. One hand which gripped the cloak was small and white. He could not see her face, but the tone of the voice and the manner in which she stepped across the stanchions and wires revealed a certain dignity.

ALL of a sudden she dropped her cloak and moved a little nearer the stage. Milton did not notice that the curtain was going down, for she presented a most astonishing appearance, bursting as it were from a chrysalis. She wore a long, trailing skirt of blue-green velvet, decorated with peacock's eyes. On her head was a nodding plume and her back was absolutely bare. Slowly she moved out upon the stage, turned and approached the footlights, and then for the first time Milton could see her plainly. Her face was one of striking beauty: deep, lustrous brown eyes and dazzling teeth. Her cheeks wore the latest make-up of tan, suggesting riotous red blood beneath. And the skirt proved to be nothing but a train. She wore pale-yellow tights, was exquisitely formed.

From the start Milton knew her for one of variety's aristocrats. Her presence was impeccable as she moved with a leisurely, effortless grace; her expression was that of one to whom applause is a matter of course and not to be sought by obvious methods. Slowly she moved about in the mazes of a peacock dance and Milton and the electrician found themselves wedged tightly in side by side between the wings.

A lightning change, and she was on the stage again in the guise of a giant moth—all silvery gray. He marveled at the swift grace of her as she moved about in the dim light. And then there came the clash of cymbals and the throb of kettle drums and she stood back-center in a shaft of light, *à l'Orientale*, her slim white body even more exposed. She danced again. It was marvelous. She seemed to flow in rhythmic movement.

She passed him once, her bare feet rustling across the floor, and he could hear her breathing softly. There was nothing suggestive, nothing in the least offensive in her dancing—a little too acrobatic, perhaps.

The curtain fell with her crouched before a squat green Buddha in a posture of abject despair.

Then directly she was hurrying past him in the darkness, adjusting her cloak about her shoulders. She opened the door of the "star" dressing-room behind him; there was a momentary glare, and she was gone. Milton turned again to the stage. A red-faced man was bouncing rubber balls on a tin plate. The electrician spoke over his shoulder:

"Some class, huh?"

Milton expressed the proper appreciation and turned his attention to the stage again. But the new act bored him. Perhaps she might have a story for his column. There was something superior in her bearing. She looked foreign. With sudden resolution he turned and approached her door. He paused there a moment and then rapped softly. The same low-pitched voice bade him enter.

She was sitting in a dressing chair before a long mirror, her feet stretched out comfortably in front of her, her cloak still wrapped around her body. She looked up at him with a quizzical narrowing of the lids.

"I'm from the *Clarion*," he explained from the door, "and I had a notion there was a story in here for me."

She smiled—a quick flash of a smile—and waved toward the only other chair. "Newspaper man, eh? Well, you people are always welcome. You keep what we want."

Milton sat down. There was the usual wardrobe trunk in the corner, the usual clutter of gowns and stockings on the walls, the pots of make-up on the dressing shelf. A single lamp hung from a bracket above the mirror.

"Well, what can I do for you?"

He had a sudden inexplicable flutter—inexplicable in that ordinarily he never had one. But her voice had the most curious throaty quality and her eyes, as she looked at him along her lower lids, a most disturbing gleam. He took hold of himself.

"No telling. That remains to be seen."

"I've some interviews in there," she pointed to the trunk, "telling what I think of prohibition and the movies, and a letter from a Federal judge and one from the director of an art museum."

"Old stuff," said Milton.

She shrugged her shoulders but said nothing.

MILTON was again at a loss; her poise was a most unusual thing. A furtive glance at her feet, bare in a pair of velvet mules, showed an alabaster skin.

"I've an idea that what I want to know might not come out just by asking you. And I've no idea just what to ask."

She smiled again.

"Perhaps I might help you if I knew what you wanted."

"It's not that, either. You see I could ask you when you were in the Follies; I might ask you where you learned to dance, where you went to school—for you obviously did—and a lot of the usual things, but somehow I've an idea, Miss Ledoux—"

"McGrath," she interrupted him. "The Ledoux fits the part better but it's not my name."

"I see."

"I might tell you that I was in the Follies in 1920—that I studied in Tiller's school in London. Well, what else is there?"

Milton swallowed. A queer little cool feeling traveled up his spine. "Will you go to supper with me tonight—after the show?"

He saw her turn quickly, saw a curious little flush mount under the make-up; and then she wetted her lips with the tip of her tongue. "Are you right sure you're a newspaper man?"

He laughed. "Surest thing you know. Why?"

She was composed again. She crossed her arms behind her head. "It's the first time in my experience I ever met one with an expense account."

"Maybe I'm different from any you've ever met."

"Perhaps."

"Well, then, that should be an inducement."

She smiled openly. "It might. What do you expect to find out from me by taking me to dinner?"

"There's no telling. That's why I want to do it. I've an idea we'll have a pretty good time." He rose to his feet, fingering his hat. "Where shall I meet you and when?"

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

She got up and came with him to the door. She laid a hand on his arm. "Thank you. I'll be glad to come. Just wait out there in the lobby. I'll not be long."

There was a momentary view of her in the aperture of the door: small, sleek head, black shadows in her eyes. And then the door closed. He went to the little entrance hall and sat down on the bench as she had directed.

In twenty minutes she joined him. She

came through the door patting her hat, with her head cocked a bit to one side and glancing at him askance with a bright twinkle in her eyes. As he rose to his feet he realized with a certain surprise her smallness. She barely reached his shoulder; none of that rich, exotic figure was evident in the trig little blue suit which she wore—severely plain. The only dash of color about her was in the rose medallions of her hat and the frank makeup of her cheeks, eyelids, and lips. There was a luster in her dark eyes and the curl of her mouth was deliciously piquant. She stood for a moment regarding him, and when her demi-toilette was finished the gleaming humor seemed to leave her.

"Well, lead the way."

He stepped into the alley and held the door open for her. At once she took his arm, pressed close against it with her bosom and he could see her peering down at the uneven paving with apprehension. He led her slowly along, carefully picking the way, for the alley was full of treacherous puddles. High, black walls rose on either side and far above them gleamed and twinkled the tiny stars. He had a curious thrill of strangeness: the warmth of her body, the soft pressure, the enveloping feel of the night and the dark walls. But stranger than these was the thought of what she was and what he was doing—she, the peacock, the moth, the nautch girl combined, utterly strange and not averse to him.

They gained the end of the alley, came out upon the transecting pavement.

"Where shall we go?" he asked.

"Hadn't you decided? A go-getter like you must have had it all doped out."

"We might try the Melrose. And the Welton is all right. And—"

"Take me home first."

"And where's home?"

She had taken him by the arm and was gently propelling him forward. "The Cavendish. It's just around the corner."

They walked along in silence, side by side. Somehow it seemed to be the wrong time to start talking about anything; the things left unsaid—implied—were more eloquent unsaid. Every now and then a man passing would turn to look at her. The clamor of the city grew more insistent; newsboys darted along, shrilling a night extra. A leisurely stream of automobiles crept endlessly by. They turned a corner into a dark street and in another moment the gloomy front of the hotel stood before them.

SHE led the way through a side entrance, in the vestibule of which was burning a very dim light. He followed into a little lobby from whence rose an elevator shaft. It was one of those automatic electric elevators which the passenger operates simply by pushing certain buttons. Without delay or explanation her hand sought the button. There was a clank and a whirring noise and she turned and looked up casually into his face.

"You didn't want any supper. Come on up."

Somehow he felt as if it needed a reply, but there was none forthcoming and it was with a certain helplessness that he stood and watched the cage come slowly down to the level of the floor. They stepped in without a word and she pushed another button, one marked "3." She knew her own mind obviously.

Came the upstairs hall, likewise dim and smelling a bit musty. These downtown hotel-keepers got the most out of their electric lamps. Down the hall he followed her. She stopped at a door near the rear wall and fumbled with her key. When the door opened she at once stepped in and switched on a light.

"Come in. Rest your hat and your mind."

He followed her slowly and looked around. The room was a fairly large one Several large armchairs covered with green stuff, a writing desk with a tiny desk light and a tall lamp in the corner with an orange shade met his eye. Not a tawdry room exactly, but the freshness seemed to have gone out of it.

Ledoux stepped over to the tall lamp and switched off the light. "Looks like a fireman's ball. Sit down."

He did. She walked into the adjoining room, where he could see the corner of a white spread and for a moment he could hear her moving about. There was a peculiar sweetish smell—it hung rather heavily. To some people it would not have been unpleasant.

Directly she came out from the inner room. She had rid herself of her hat and was adjusting a back hairpin. She stood in front of him for a moment, occupied with her hair. "Not much of a dump, is it? But I'm saving my money and—it'll do."

And then without further introduction she slipped into his lap. Quite naturally she moved until she was comfortable and as she slid one arm about his neck there was nothing strained or awkward in her movements—only a slight quizzical or cynical amusement in her dark eyes. The scent seemed to be in her hair.

"Move back a little. There! That's better. Everything's comfy and cozy. Now, what do you want to know?"

"Well—that's hard to say. It's not as easy to think as it was."

She laughed—suddenly and rather loudly. She threw back her head, and opened her mouth so that he could see down into it. And then she leaned her head back against his shoulder and began to pick at a thread on his coat lapel.

"It would make a real snappy interview, wouldn't it—if you spoke out in church?"

He made no reply.

"Perhaps you think this is nothing unusual. But believe me, dearie, you're wrong. You looked so clean and fresh and nice that I knew—I just couldn't resist it. We stage girls live pretty lonely lives. Give us a kiss."

Her lips felt hard and stiff and sticky; there was no yielding to them; she met her obligation in a thoroughly workmanlike manner—in no wise slurring over any of it. When she had finished—the matter in her own hands entirely—she straightened up again and began to fix her hair, which was gorgeously thick and gorgeously black and gorgeously glossy.

"This is a hick town of yours—what's your name?"

"Milton."

"WELL, Milton, this is a city of beautiful slumber. Years ago it had a reputation of being the wickedest city since Gomorrah. But nowadays the good people tell themselves bedside stories and call it a day. Ho-hum! Why do you stay here?"

"I happen to live here. But that isn't the point. It's you that's giving the interview. How do *you* happen to be here?"

"Here?" She punched his knee. "You ought to know. You sheiked me. But you mean the long story, don't you? What are you going to do with it, little boy, when you get it? I'll bet you never— But maybe you have. One can never tell."

"Well, let's hear it."

She cuddled against his shoulder but no longer left her head there. As she spoke she concerned herself with a string of jet beads which hung from her neck. "In the first place," she began, "my people are nice people." She paused. "I suppose every actress you ever met has told you that. But mine were. We lived in Rahway, New Jersey."

"How did you happen to take up dancing?"

"How? Oh, that came in time. I always could dance. Most girls can. It was merely a matter of a few lessons." She turned abruptly and looked into his eyes with that quizzical look of light cynicism he had seen in her the first time. "You've got a sweetie, haven't you?"

"Why? What makes you say that?"

"You have, haven't you? Oh, I can tell. It's the way you behave."

He said nothing and she extricated her right arm and with her finger ran along the lower lids of his eyes. "You've got nice eyes. Is she pretty?"

"I didn't say I had one."

"Oh, well, then, if you're not going to claim her, I'll do a little speaking for myself." She leaned her head back against his shoulder and began to finger his cheek, kneading it softly. "Will you be sorry when I'm gone?"

He paused before replying. "The thought of it is unthinkable."

"Do you know, there's something I like in the way you talk. You step right up into them. What's that? Wait a minute."

Steps were sounding in the hall. Her body became suddenly rigid as she sat there listening. And then, with all the abruptness of a blow the door flew open and a short, stocky man came into the room.

Just inside the threshold he stopped and a startled look of surprise came into his face and then a hard little sneer. Ledoux had sprung to her feet and was facing him.

"You ought to lock your door," he said in a hard voice burred by a foreign thickness of tongue.

"Get out of here, Block." Milton hardly recognized the tone as hers. "Who told you you could come up?"

The man laughed and came past her, walked toward the bedroom. He took off his coat and tossed it through the door on to the bed. He still kept his derby on.

"Did you hear me? Get that coat and beat it. You've got a crust. Go on, I tell you."

The intruder faced about and looked her over. Coolly his regard swept her from head to foot and then he turned his back on her. "How do you get that way? What do you think you're tryin' to do?"

At the first verbal exchange Milton had risen to his feet. Queer little tingly feelings were traveling up and down his spine. There was a coldness somewhere. When the man turned from the woman he looked at Milton with the same insolent insouciance. It was the necessary touch. Milton stepped forward. "Don't worry," he said. "I'll not interfere. I was only calling."

"Yeah. I see you were. Well, where's your card?"

"Don't pay any attention to him, Milton. And you get out of here, Block. He's with the show and he thinks he runs the universe," she told Milton, and then again faced the newcomer. "This boy is a personal friend of mine, see?"

The man laughed.

"Don't bother. It's time I was going anyway. Hope I haven't disturbed anything." Milton walked toward the door.

Ledoux came toward him, stood at his elbow, but she did not touch him. Very directly she looked into his eyes; there was apparent a vast regret, a spark of anger, a certain waiting restraint. "You don't believe me, do you?"

"Sure I do. But I must be on my way. See you again sometime."

The little squat man stood in the room and watched them.

"See, now you've driven him away." She turned to Milton and took hold of his sleeve. "Call me up, will you, Milton? Please—tomorrow?"

"If I can."

He turned to go. He closed the door softly behind him. As he walked down the dim and murky hall he could hear her voice rising in angry protest behind the closed door.

ON WEDNESDAY morning the Reverend Abner Poteet sat in his study and gazed out through the window at the sparkling green of his side lawn. He held a penholder in one hand and every now and then he would tap it against his lips. The penholder was scarred with some fresh indentations. Poteet was counted a lonely man—a man somewhat aloof from the scramble of the day. His flock agreed it was the proper attitude for a minister to hold. As he sat in the cool freshness of the morning, he frowned. He was feeling the "spring fret," but he did not recognize it. He was thinking that there were elements in the life of his parish which were escaping him.

Rosy, the maid, came to the door and announced Mrs. William Martin.

Mr. Poteet frowned more deeply. He was missing some of the human contacts which he should be making, but there was no excuse for having any thrust upon him that sunshiny morning. Mrs. Martin was loquacious.

"Show her in, Rosa."

A moment later the clubwoman came timidly across the threshold. She smiled obsequiously and held out her hand. The Reverend Mr. Poteet took it while he looked about him.

"Take that chair," he said. "Now—what can I do for you?"

"I do hope I'm not disturbing you, doctor."

"No. Not at all." He was momentarily busy with a number of little details about his desk. "Fine morning."

"Oh, it's lovely! You have such a beautiful place here, doctor."

"And how's the good husband?"

"Will? Will's all right! He's troubled with sour stomach. He has—a—he has heartburn. I'm afraid poor Will will go off with heart trouble some day." She sighed and the Reverend Mr. Poteet had a passing vision of the copious William making a storage warehouse of his stomach.

"I trust not," he said. "Maybe you are unnecessarily alarmed."

Mrs. Martin sighed again. She frowned and the line of her soft, yielding lips became suddenly hard. Poteet looked at her curiously.

"Doctor! Are you going to take Mr. Brille's money for the hospital?"

It was quite sudden. "Mr. Brille's money? Oh! Why, yes, if he is disposed to give it!"

Mrs. Martin turned her head and gazed through the window at the pastoral beauties of the side yard.

"Why do you ask, Mrs. Martin?"

"Oh," she sighed, "I was in hopes—" Suddenly she turned and bored into him with her eyes, soft and languishing no longer. "Doctor! I'm going to take you into my confidence—something you didn't know."

Mr. Poteet waited. Mrs. Martin fussed about with the packages in her lap.

"Two weeks ago," she began, weighing her words, "Mr. Brille sent a representative in to see Will—Mr. Martin. You know Mr. Martin has one of the largest department stores in the city—"

Poteet inclined his head.

"Well—" Here she paused and seemed at a loss how to proceed. "Well—he told Mr. Martin that his store was a firetrap. He said that the staircases were about to fall down—that the elevators were not—were actually dangerous. And Mr. Martin put those elevators in only five years ago. Oh, he told my husband everything!"

She paused again and emotion seemed to consume her. Her breast heaved convulsively.

Poteet waited on her in patience.

"You know we could not imagine what prompted the *Ledger* to attack Will that way. Of course, they were putting on a campaign for safety—for safety on the streets—to the public in general."

Poteet waited for her to go on.

"And you know, doctor, it would have cost fifty thousand dollars—not a cent less—to do all that the *Ledger* reporter said ought to be done. Times have been hard, what with people not buying—you know?"

Here she paused so long and stared at him so intently that Poteet became nervous. "Did your husband know you were coming to tell me this?"

"No. Oh, no! He would be very angry if he knew I did. But I'm getting to the point." Here she paused, pulled her chair nearer and looked at him significantly. "Will—Mr. Martin heard in a roundabout fashion—at least he was told—well, Mr. Martin has been offered a big contract with the *Ledger* for his exclusive advertising—and—well—"

The good woman stared into her lap and appeared unhappy.

"WILL'S best friend is advertising manager on one of the other papers and—oh, Dr. Poteet, don't you suppose that if something could be done to prevent that sort of thing among the better sort of people in Goldsboro—if you were to refuse to take his money—"

Poteet smiled wryly. "I don't know what you're driving at, Mrs. Martin. But it seems to me that the matter is in your husband's hands entirely. I'm not a business man and he knows his own business. If I were you, I think I would advise him to put his building in safe condition, advertising or no advertising."

"Yes. Oh, yes! You're quite right. And we will see that is done. But the point is, Dr. Poteet, you don't know. Mr. Brille is such a vindictive man. He could ruin Will by just running things in his paper. And—you know he takes everything personally. And he makes everything a crusade, so that anything or anybody that the *Ledger* comes out against just has to quit, you know. Do you have to take his money, Dr. Poteet?"

"I'm afraid we have no choice, Mrs. Martin. It has already been accepted."

"Yes, I see. I just thought maybe—"

A long pause—silence settled over the room. Clouds passed for the moment across the sun, dimming the brilliance of the garden. Brille had obviously started paying for the hospital.

Mrs. Martin rose suddenly to her feet. Her smile returned with all its old brilliance; she had rid herself of all her vapors. With great animation she viewed the prospect, cheerily and hopefully. And then with a dash of real spirit:

"I do think, doctor, that you are doing a wonderful work here. It is such a troublous time—jazz and respect for the law. There just isn't any. I don't know what we're all coming to. I say to the Club that we women can have just whatever civilization we want. The trouble is, we don't step up and demand it. All the divorces and the bootleggers and the scandal! I say it's because we don't worship God right—in the old-fashioned way." Here she paused, deeply thoughtful. And then, a sudden gleam of light appearing in her eyes, she came a step nearer the desk.

"I—a—Mr. Martin and I were down at the Welton Hotel last night. There was a party of young men at the next table. And they had all been drinking. Mr. Martin and I don't ordinarily go to the Welton at night, but we were out for a drive and I said to Mr. Martin: 'Will, let's go down and get a sandwich and a glass of root beer and hear the music.' You know. So we went down and at the next table these boys were having a party. One of them turned over a serving table and all the dishes were broken. It made an awful crash. I—there were two or three of the young men of this parish, Dr. Poteet. I don't ordinarily approve of tale-bearing, but I don't mind telling you I was surprised at seeing some of them. That young Caraway boy—he's a fine, bright young man, I don't mind saying. And I've always more or less admired him. But I guess it's in the times. Everybody's got the jazz spirit. They were all just as disorderly as they could be. And the point is, doctor, they were all breaking the law: every one of them. Will just laughed when we got home."

Poteet walked over to the door and held it open. "I've been thinking of what you told me about the *Ledger*," he said. "I'm sorry to hear it. It's something we all ought to interest ourselves in personally. Has—a—has Mr. Martin taken steps to—a—to enhance the safety of his building? It seems to me that's the thing to be done. Diminish the fire risk as much as possible."

Mrs. Martin was in the depths of a dream. "Oh!" She roused herself with a start. "Why, yes, indeed, doctor! I'm sure he will—or has. Dr. Poteet!" She held out her hand impulsively. "I'm terribly afraid I've burdened you with my troubles. I've taken up so much of your valuable time."

"Not at all, Mrs. Martin. It's what I'm here for."

"Such a help to me, doctor! I don't know what we'd do without you."

"You'd have some one else, Mrs. Martin."

"I'm sure no one half so sympathetic or understanding. Well, good-by, doctor."

"Good morning, Mrs. Martin. Come and see me whenever I can be of service."

"Thank you so much. Good-by, doctor."

The door closed on her. It was closed softly, with the utmost consideration for the decorum of a minister's study. Poteet went back across the room to the window. He stood there for a long time, staring out across the sun-splashed lawn.

THE following night Milton Caraway stepped upon the Poteet porch. He rang the bell. The glow was fading from the sky and as he waited the arc lamp on the corner flashed on and began to sputter; its light came in fitful flashes between the trees.

"Miss Alma says she will be out in a few minutes," said the maid.

"Oh! Why, yes! Fine! I'll stay right here if you don't mind."

He sat down in the porch swing and lighted a cigarette. As he swung slowly to and fro a frown came into his face and deepened. One hand fumbling in his coat pocket brought forth some ticket stubs. He looked at them and then crumpled them up and threw them over the porch rail into the bushes.

The door opened and Alma Poteet came forth, glancing cursorily across the wide sweep of porch. She spied him and raised her hand. At once the screak of the swing stopped. She was wearing a simple little white frock with lace about the neck and with elbow sleeves. In the twilight she was like a breath from some old forgotten romance, slender and shadowy fresh. As she slipped into the swing, he caught a faint perfume of spring wild flowers.

"Why didn't you come in? We had shortcake. Dad said it was a sonnet in piecrust."

"I'll bet."

They sat side by side, each watching the other. Milton flipped his cigarette over into the bushes and leaned back against the cushion. "I've had you on my mind rather more than usual ever since Monday."

A pause.

"What have you been doing with yourself?"

He leaned forward slightly, seemed not to have heard her. "Seems like I've been waiting for this night to come—all my life."

Airily she adjusted her skirt. "You've been nice and patient about it. And it doesn't seem to have worn you much."

Silence. The night slipped down. Stars were winking and gleaming—tiny facets in a velvet sky. There were little momentary stirrings in the lilac bushes; a breeze came sighing through the elms.

"You know what I was saying the other night about there being no realities? Well, I'm more convinced than ever."

"You're three days older."

"Yeah. More than that. Alma! There's no use putting it off any longer. When I see anything as beautiful as you are I want to put out my hand and take it—keep it for always. When I see the sordidness, the pettiness in the pitiful scum that clings so close to the earth— Why, ever since Monday I've wanted to gather you up and go soaring way up where the winds are clean and free and there's nothing but clouds and sky and sun and deep night with stars."

"And you haven't done it? How did it happen you slid so far out of your orbit last night?"

"What's that?" The cool, detached tone of her voice and laugh was jarring. "What do you mean?"

"Jake Greenough was telling me you all had quite a party."

Silence.

"Jake's a vicious old hag. What did he say?"

"I don't think that matters."

"Don't think it matters?" He leaned toward her, his eyes searching her face. "Alma, are you in earnest? Listen. Going on a party with a bunch of intrinsic old drunks hasn't anything to do with it so long as it doesn't touch you—the thing the rest go after."

"Jake said you were all pretty well boiled."

"Well, Jake lied." He got up and walked across the porch and stood for a moment against the corner post, gazing into the sky. Alma sat swinging softly to and fro, and directly he returned; but he did not occupy the swing again. He sat on the railing instead, his feet propped between the posts. "I don't want you to think that I'd talk one way to you—about the things that really matter—and then go out and do something else. It's true I'd had something to drink. But I didn't even think about it. I wasn't drunk. Not any more than I am now. Not half as much, for that matter." He had turned away and the last part of his remark trailed off into the darkness.

The swing began to screak again. The arc light on the corner, which had gone out, came on with a sputter, sending its blue-white stabs through the soft foliage of the elms.

SHE had said nothing through it all. Suddenly he got down off the railing and walked over and sat down on the window sill not far away. "It just spoils everything."

And then in the shadow she was coming toward him, was touching him on the arm. "I didn't say that it had. I didn't believe all Jake said."

He took her by both arms; they were standing face to face in the dim light of the porch, her head a bit past his shoulder. "Alma! Alma! Do you know it? I love you. I do, Alma. I want you—with all the power that's in me. I haven't known what was the matter exactly—why it was that nothing I wanted to say, nothing I wanted to do ever got said or done unless there was something of you in it.

"Smell those lilacs. Look at that feathery tree-top quivering against that black sky. Hear the sleepy twitter of the birds in the trees. And feel the warm night and the infinite spaces, and time going on and on forever. You're all those things in my heart. You and they—they're all the same thing to me."

He stooped over and peered into her face, so misty and white. And she stood looking back at him without moving.

"I love you, Alma. With all my heart and soul I love you. And now let's go walk about in the garden."

"The dew—" she began as he led her forward.

"It's not going to hurt."

They passed a shadowy rose-bush which was all moonlight and shadow. A budding rose swayed slightly on its stalk. He reached over and plucked it, put it into her hand. "This is a wild, tremendous night, for all the calm that's in the world. It seems I've been living for years just for now, just for the few minutes that come between sundown and the time when I'll be telling you good-night. It's the time, perhaps, all of me was made for, in which all the fire of me will be flaming forth—even if there's never a spark again, later."

"Why, Milton!" She was walking slowly, her fingers touching his arm.

"And it doesn't matter. It's just as I'd have it. It's been my hope for myself. I'd go through anything just to feel the joy I'm having now."

He turned suddenly and again took her

by the arm. "You're feeling some of it for *me*, too, aren't you?"

"Yes," she said.

"I'm not going to kiss you. Hardly I want to touch you. It's not that way I feel. Look," he said in a lighter, more thrilling tone, "the stars! There are millions of them—all mild and winky and warm. And each one a surging flame, come to its destruction, its glory. In a star's tomorrow—who knows?—it may be all black and empty and forgotten—all save its glorious today."

"Milton, don't! You make me feel so desolate. It makes me ache—here."

"I know. There's the beauty of it, Alma. You and I—and those stars—hung out in a limitless night—just you and I together with this flaming glory in our hearts. Why, the world—and life—they don't matter. Just you and I and the night and the stars. You'll never forget this moment, will you?"

"No," she whispered. "There's something gone for all time. There's something born—forever."

A filmy scud went hurrying past—they were gazing upward through a break in the trees. It writhed and twisted, turned over and was gone.

"Did you see that? It *was* a minute ago; it isn't any longer. That's the great and beautiful pity of all beauty. Perhaps we are the only people in the world who even saw it. So much and so little. Why should any one cry for any more of life when he's tasted it supremely—once? And yet—

"I'm going to ask you to kiss me once—here. And then I'm going, and I'll walk down all the old unhappy streets in town. And I want you to sit for a while in your window, looking out off south, yonder, with your elbows on the window sill. So that in the eyes of my mind I can see you and know that in all this turmoil and confusion and scrambling misery and ugliness there is you—that thing in you that wakes up this thing in me."

Their figures in the garden were one indiscriminate blur—motionless, dim, shadowy. For a time they stood thus, and then their forms, dissolving into motion, might have been seen returning toward the house. So it seemed to eyes watching from an upstairs window.

The Poteets had an old-fashioned gate; a Mr. Blonger, in the iron business in the early days of Goldsboro, had hung it there in 1891. It had a low, querulous creak and it would clank sepulchrally if left to its own devices.

Milton was leaning against it, propping it open. And Alma Poteet stood very near; the topmost tendrils of her hair brushing his face. Neither spoke; they stood there, seemingly waiting without haste and without concern. In the center of the garden was a plot of close-cropped grass. The moonlight was flooding this till it brimmed with silver—rimmed about with the warm shadows of the lilacs. There was not a sound save perhaps the most delicate whisper in the trees whose tops were bending over, and across the moon the cloud wraith twisted and passed.

"Good night!" he said.

"Good night! Good night!"

IF A student of social institutions and social organization had so desired he might have gone through the telephone directory of Goldsboro shortly after nightfall any night and called each number that he found in turn and found material for an observation on the decay of the ancient civilization there. A surprising number of the telephone subscribers would have been found somewhere else. In short, home life in Goldsboro was not the thing pictured in the advertisements of art rugs, pipeless furnaces, talking machines, and smoking tobacco. There was a hectic quality in it, a feeling on the part of many that Goldsboro was merely a temporary roosting place, that sooner or later there would come tempting calls from the farther frontiers to lure them on.

There were, of course, exceptions. On Friday evening, June 13, 1923, at a quarter past eight, John and Milton Caraway were sitting in the back parlor, and from their appearance of complete relaxation it did not seem likely that outside diversion might ever claim them. The side windows were open; there was a small reading-lamp on the long walnut table furnishing all the light in the compartment, and the two men sat well back in the shadow. Both were smoking.

John Caraway, as usual, sat with both feet planted firmly on the floor. Milton, on the other hand, had slid forward until his body was almost horizontal, his feet crossed on the floor in front of him. Each man seemed to be entirely absorbed in his thoughts. The clock on the mantel ticked away; through the open window came the occasional reminder of the town outside: the rush of a motorcar or the distant clang of a trolley bell. But to these, neither of the men gave the slightest attention. A door opened in the back of the house and there were steps in the hall; old George, passing, looked through the door. For a moment he could be heard puttering about in the front hall, and a little later he came back by the door again, with his stiff-kneed, shuffling gait.

The minutes passed. The clock on the mantel struck the half-hour, and still neither of the men made a move. Then, very quietly, John Caraway turned his head and looked at Milton; he looked at Milton's feet and legs; he seemed very thoughtful. There were very tired lines about his eyes and deep, dark-ringed pockets. The men at the mill called him "the old war horse." It was never easy to estimate the depth of his thought from the expression of his face, for that expression was usually the same at all times. Tonight it might have seemed to some, perhaps, that for the time being he had laid aside the gage of battle.

Milton leaned awkwardly forward and flicked his cigarette ash toward the fireplace.

The telephone bell rang. Each looked at the other.

"It's for me," John Caraway said to Milton.

He got up and walked out into the hall.

The telephone was placed on a small table there under the front stairway; it was therefore just across from the sitting-room door. Caraway walked slowly to the table, did not close the door behind him. Milton heard him take down the receiver.

There was a pause.

"John Caraway speaking. . . . Yes. . . . Oh, Brille! . . . How are you?"

There are times when the sound waves are of such length as to stir the component parts of the receiver into harmonic vibration with the voice of the speaker. It is usually the case with harsh or resonant voices. Milton could hear Brille's voice stalking through its metallic lines: "Waa-waa-waa."

For quite a while the sound persisted. And then silence. Milton turned and looked over his shoulder and could see the old man stooped over at the spindly table. His legs were ridiculously thick by contrast—thick above the knees. The trousers were full to bursting. One thick hand lay quietly on his knee. Milton smiled gently to himself and then tossed the cigarette onto the hearth.

Then Caraway was speaking: "What is it you say you want to do?"

And then the rasping again.

"No. Of course you can't discuss it over the phone. . . . No. I'm staying home this evening. Sorry. . . . I'll drop in tomorrow. Can't come tonight. Sorry. . . . Yes. You bet I will. . . . Good-by."

He came ponderously back into the room. Milton, straightening in his chair, turned and humorously regarded him.

"I'll bet there are not many men in town would turn down an assignation with the old harlot like that. What is he trying to get out of you? Better be careful, Governor."

Caraway grunted and sat down.

In a few minutes two blue spirals of smoke again sought the ceiling.

"If I were you, I'd cut out that sort of talk, Milton. It never gets you anywhere. It's easy to talk."

Milton laughed. "Yeah. Maybe you're right. But what's the difference? Why not tie a few cans to his tail?"

"No. You've got the wrong idea. Brille has got the biggest paper in this part of the country—"

"He admits it."

"—and as an advertising medium it is unexcelled. Stuff in it gets to the people. There are a good many things about it the town would suffer without."

Milton scratched his head.

CARAWAY had paused. He was ordinarily fluent, rarely had to search for the word. "If you're going to attack a man—attack him. Wait until you've got the stuff on him and then go to it. If you haven't—lay off. Folks have been telling me what you did to the Women's Club; that's bad business. You'll never build up a following that way. It's easy enough to tear down, but it takes real stuff to build up something better in the place of what you've torn down."

Milton was smiling quietly to himself, his hand across his mouth.

"Now this fellow Brille—he doesn't make many pretensions on the whole."

"Hah! You know what I heard him say one day—one day last month, just a week after I got home?"

Caraway made no reply; he was turning his own thought over in his mind.

"Some bird was trying to get him to do something down in the Club—I forget what. Brille turned on him—this chap had been saying something and Brille turned on him and said: 'I'm the richest, most influential man west of the Alleghenies.' Yes, he did. I'll swear to it. And the funny thing is he believes it. It doesn't strike him as funny at all. He said it to the poor bird who was trying to sell him something just as one announces a fact. And he got away with it. The other chap shut up.

"There's something colossal in that sort of conceit," Milton went on. "It's a sort of blindness—insanity. A man like that puts himself on a level with God Almighty—doesn't see the slightest difference—like a cockroach patronizing an eagle."

Caraway looked up from his reverie. "He was asking me the other day why I didn't send you down to him—learn the game from a real outfit."

Silence settled over the room. It was a fine, restful place, that room; fragrant and warm with a quiet sort of sociableness and established well-being. Milton got up and walked over to the long walnut table. He stood there a moment, fingering a newspaper. Suddenly he picked it up, looked at it, and then walked back with it to his chair.

"To hear you talk, J. C., I might think you stood in with Brille, if I didn't know better. But I think I can understand your motives. Judged by them the *Ledger* and its master are O.K. They get results. I doubt if I could go to a better school to study chromos. They've got the twist to land the poor fish.

"I could go down to the *Ledger* and learn journalism as it's practiced. No doubt of it. Maybe make a lot of money out of it. But then, on the other hand, what would it do to me?"

He had been holding the paper on his lap. Suddenly he looked up from it and at his father.

Caraway laughed. "I'm not asking you to work for Brille. You picked out the newspaper game. That's your affair. If you're going in it, then learn some of the ways how it's done."

Again a long silence settled upon the room. The controversy had been a quiet one, pitched in normal tone and tempo. The blue smoke hovered in the air, hung in motionless and filmy strata. The clock on the mantel began to strike, a short, metallic, inevitable note.

"WHAT you've said about the *Clarion*," Milton resumed, "is perfectly true. One gets in a bad way there, too. It's always yowling for the under dog—for Labor. Labor's just as dumb as Capital, or dumber—else it wouldn't be on the bottom. All that Labor is concerned about is its own belly. More pay and less work— That's the motto of the whole human race, and it's a good enough motto. Be my motto, too, if it weren't for your money. The only reason I stick to the *Clarion* is that it gives me a chance to say what *I* think without forcing me to ask first what I ought to think—because of the advertising.

"When I first landed here—last March—the finest thing—the finest object I could aim at, seemed to me, was to go in the game and plan to run the old prostitute out of town. But somehow it doesn't seem so important now as it did. More and more I'm coming to the opinion that a man should steer clear of this reforming job and stick to his knitting. See if he can't make something approximating a man of *himself*. That's a big enough job for one lifetime. And maybe I'll come down some of these days and ask you for a decent job in what *you* call 'a constructive industry.' I feel myself getting practical."

Caraway looked up quickly and his hand sought his mouth.

The clock struck again. Milton got up, stretched and yawned. "I'm going to bed. This job has had me up for six straight nights—this job and other jobs." He grinned.

There was a rustling of papers. Caraway likewise rose to his feet. Slowly they filed out of the sitting-room into the hall. They climbed the stairs, the older man in front walking slowly, holding to the shining banister.

They reached the upstairs hall. Caraway turned and took hold of Milton's elbow, and his eyes sought Milton's a bit unsteadily.

"Go ahead with that new notion of yours. I've got certain plans I've had for you—for a number of years. Didn't see fit to bring the matter up first, but—I'd like to talk to you about it when you've a mind to."

He spoke very low and there was a simple directness in his tone which left no room for doubt. A faint smile came into Milton's face—it died away and left a look of far-away and somewhat wistful question. The old man had turned and was walking down the hall. Milton followed him. They went into Caraway's bedroom and Milton sat down on Caraway's bed.

"I was on the level about that, Governor," he said, thoughtfully staring at his foot. "You see, I've got that old-fashioned notion to settle down." He looked up and found Caraway staring at him: dark, overhanging brows with that look of unalterable taciturnity—would the man never flash into life? "It's this way—I'm going to settle down. I'm going to marry. I'm going to be a steady, respectable cog because I crave the things that come to steady, respectable cogs. In short, I'm a thoroughgoing reactionary and I may even vote with the Grand Old Party."

He looked up again. Caraway's gaze had not altered. It was disconcerting; one could never tell how he was taking things.

Milton stood up and was about to go.

"Who is the girl?"

"Girl? Why, yes, there *is* a girl! I hadn't told you that, had I?" There was a momentary shrinking from the mere speaking of the name. The old man somehow was so— "It's Alma Poteet, Governor. Daughter of the Reverend Abner Poteet of the Marshall Hardy Episcopal Church." He was flushing rosy red and he caught one more look at the swart figure standing by the mantelpiece.

"Well, good night, Governor," he said casually, got up and left the room.

When he reached his own quarters he was surprised to find that his pulse was racing, that he was distinctly nervous. He had always assured himself that he had the stuff in him to tell the old man anything. But there was in this something of an ordeal. Funny, too, the way the old codger had taken it—raising his hand to his face and staring off at the wall with a stare as glassy as a wall-eyed horse. He hadn't said a word, but that was to have been expected.

HE HADN'T meant to stop with Henry Deems and Lonny Cox but then Princeton had just won the ball game with Yale and it was rather good fun "reuning" there in the Club all by themselves, and Deems and Cox were such good eggs and a man so easily got in the habit of drawing into his old shell and not taking the trouble to be sociable. And it was something that touched the depths to pause for a little while and realize that the old commencement ritual—tradition that had endured for generations—was being observed there in New Jersey, and that it all stood for honor and loyalty—things one gave one's life for.

It wasn't that he hadn't control of himself at all—not in the least. The fare box on the car was just a little blurry. It was the most delightful afternoon—a little warm. "I'll take four tickets," he said, and looked earnestly at the conductor. "Run out of 'em too quick."

There were only two car checks resting there in the palm of his hand. "I said *four* tickets."

"Another nickel," the conductor was saying.

"I want four," Milton insisted. "Four tickets." These laboring classes were thick—dull—slow.

"They're two for fifteen," said the conductor. "You only gave me a quarter."

So he had. "Why, surely! Yes. Here's some more."

The conductor was pouring some small change into his hand. No use to count it. He shoved it into his pocket and started into the car. The conductor reached out and grabbed him by the arm.

"Drop your fare into the box."

Milton looked around angrily, recollected, and flushed. An elderly lady who was standing behind him—she was a pink-and-white old soul in a crisp, black-silk dress and with powder-puff cheeks—glared at him and then swept past him into the car. Milton fished for a car check. He dropped it into the box, looked the conductor steadily in the face.

"Pardon me," he said, still watching the conductor. "Pardon me." He stepped into the car. A lovely scent assailed his nostrils: fresh, virginal, like roses washed in dew—or violets. "Pardon me." He was getting drowsy. He took hold of himself; people might suspect he had been drinking.

He got off the car and started over toward Emerson Avenue. He was suddenly apprehensive—he should have bought some peppermint lozenges—his breath might be a little raw. And then he tried to recollect just why he was coming out to see Alma. No reason that he could think of except—Lord, what a beautiful place Goldsboro was in June!

Lilac bushes peeped over an old brick wall; checkered shade lay across the narrow brick pavement; the shining bonnet of a huge automobile came poking out of a stable door into the street. There was a thick, heavy fragrance stirring in the air—magic stuff of spring—that made his throat ache with the beauty of it. He reached up and tore off a lilac sprig, held it to his nose a minute with its delightful coolness.

As he entered the Poteets' gate he still clutched the flower.

It was a careless thing to do, to leave the rug puckered up like that so one's foot naturally slipped into it. And it was an unfortunate thing that in falling his arm should have brushed the card table, and still more unfortunate that the silly little card tray should have slid off onto the polished floor. The Poteets' house was full of such little trifles. It was a diabetic Cupid that held a seashell with the smirk of salvaged humanity on its face and for a moment he had a sort of unholy joy to see its miserable head roll off its body and under the table. He got down on his hands and knees, but he could not find it.

His head was aching when he sat down in the sweet coolness of the parlor. He felt awkward about the tray, and then he wondered why he had come at all. The clock on the mantel, waving a silent pendulum, said a quarter to six. He wondered if the accident in the hall had made much noise; it had seemed enough to wake the dead at the time. Well, he would tell her he had just dropped in—to ask her to go to the Chaliapin concert next Monday night. She loved music.

STEPS were sounding in the hall. Milton began to smile: his explaining how he had stumbled over the rug and had grabbed Rosy around the legs with one arm as he hit the floor! He rose to his feet. "Hear me makin' myself at home in your front hall—" He paused. The Reverend Mr. Poteet was coming into the room.

"How do you do, Milton?" he said. "No. Don't get up. Fine weather we're having."

"Sir? Oh, yes, you bet!" He calmed himself, summoning his suavest manner.

Dr. Poteet shot him a look from the table where he was rummaging about among the magazines. "I thought I left it here."

"Can I fin' it for you?" Milton rose to his feet and stood swaying a moment. Confound it! The minute they turned off the light or closed the shutters it made one so awfully dizzy. As a concession he sat down again.

The minister turned around and regarded him. "Milton, I've been hearing some disturbing things."

"Some 'sturbing things? People frequently hear 'sturbing things if they're not careful how they get 'sturbed." He laughed slyly. "Don't pay to listen to all you hear. I don't believe half I hear. 'Swat's the matter with public opinion. Just circ'lates round and doesn't rep'sent what people really think 'tall." He paused and looked at Mr. Poteet—he was making a fool of himself—that door was a steady, fixed thing. "What you been hearin', doctor?"

"Don't you think, Milton, that you might use a little more judgment?" He was pursing his lips and his eyes looked very keen—and hard.

"Judgment?" A little more time and he would best this thing. "And what about, sir?"

"Well, I don't know that I care to have you—a—spend quite so much of your time here."

Something snapped in Milton's head. A hot, surging something rose and pressed from behind his temples. Why, confound the old muff! "You don't care—you don't want? Do you mind repeating what you have just said, sir?"

"It has come to my ears lately that you and Alma are supposed to be engaged."

"Yes?" His head was clearing. Here was something not so simple.

"Naturally I went to Alma," continued the Reverend Mr. Poteet.

"Yes? And what did she say?" He had to speak very slowly, somehow.

"She said that nothing definite had been decided."

Milton's heart gave a queer little tug. But he said nothing, sat there watching the shrewd old face with all the intensity he could muster.

Mr. Poteet turned to him again. His mouth curled at the corner as if the thought which burdened his mind carried a certain acrid flavor. "Naturally, under the circumstances, it is a situation which is not entirely to my liking."

"I can see perhaps how that might be." Milton nodded. The blood was pounding in his head, though about his heart it had seemingly stopped.

But Poteet paid him no heed. "There are several reasons why I might object—that form the basis of my objection. I—a—I would not choose you for a son-in-law if left to my own devices and—a—as a matter of fact I can't say that I am particularly pleased with your being even her associate."

Milton laughed. "Well," he said, "that's frank. That's frank. I don't know when I've met with greater frankness." And then he suddenly sobered. He was feeling cool now. "I don't know that I blame you hardly."

Mr. Poteet held up his hand. "It's not because of any one thing—anything you do. You're in another circle of life—I might say even a different standard of beliefs. You have a different feeling toward things—a different philosophy. Now Alma has been raised—"

"That sounds a bit odd, Mr. Poteet, coming from you. I happen to have been baptized in your church—or so they tell me—in your own congregation."

"Your father pays pew rent there and he is a liberal contributor—"

"Listen, Dr. Poteet. What's the big idea? I admit I shouldn't have come here this afternoon—but then there's something else behind that."

"Very well. I'll put it to you straight." There was no more facial distortion, no more indication of internal struggle. "When you have a daughter—one like mine—you'll appreciate my feelings. I'm putting it to you straight, mind you—assuming you have the capacity of finer understanding. Alma is all that is fine and good to me. Since she was a little thing, an infant in her mother's arms, she has seemed to me the real answer to life. In her crib she lifted my faith in God and the Life Eternal. Nothing as lovely as she was could be born just to live and return to the dust from whence she came. And since her mother left us, I've—well, she's been my grip on myself." He paused and looked steadily into Milton's eyes, and his lips were trembling. "So"—with an outflinging of the hand—"you must pardon me if when I see her trifled with—"

"Well, now, doctor—"

"Just one moment. I happen to know your kind—know your set—the standards of your living. Part of my congregation, I admit. But I am not blind to their—and your—lack of reverence—your flippancy—your disregard for everything that is established. You think it is stupid and—and—stodgy. You are concerned only with the pleasures of the moment—at any cost to yourself or to the world that supports you, to drug yourselves into still further profanations."

Milton laughed.

"I would break your body with these hands if—if I thought you—if you laid hands upon her—"

"Dr. Poteet, what fool has been talking to you? Why, it's preposterous!"

The minister paused, looked about the room then picked up a small paper-knife from the table. His hand was trembling so that Milton could see it from where he sat. Directly he spoke again, but he avoided Milton's eyes and his voice was labored.

"I—a—I'm sorry. As a matter of fact, I'm not quite myself."

THERE was a pause; Milton struggled desperately with his clouded consciousness, wondering just what to do or say. It had been a rotten sort of thing to come here, any way.

"I went to Alma," the doctor went on as if in mitigation of himself, "and she told me that she loved you."

He paused. A silence obtained that was most curiously peaceful. There was the dim coolness of the shuttered room. From the sprig of lilac which Milton had pulled, and which lay on the table top, a faint perfume emanated.

Milton laughed softly. And yet there

was foreboding in his heart—uncertainty. "Well," he said, "I should think that might make a difference in your attitude—set some of your fears at rest."

Mr. Poteet rose. Milton marveled at the expression in his face. "It's just that—just that. That's why I am willing to do anything to prevent it. It's why I am speaking to you at all."

It suddenly occurred to the boy that the occasion required his mastery. He had made an egregious error in coming to the house in his condition; he had doubtless been guilty of certain unconventionalities at times that had got under the old fellow's skin. And ministers were such bundles of forms and conventions and lived such tight, pretty little lives that naturally they were more easily upset. He rose to his feet. He walked over and laid his hand upon the clergyman's arm.

"Dr. Poteet," he said reassuringly, "I offer you my profound apology. I haven't anything to say in explanation except that I forgot myself. I assure you"—being slightly dizzy, he reached out and steadied himself, took hold of the table—"I assure you that it will not happen again. As for the other matter—don't you think it had best work itself out? After all, Alma is the judge for herself, and while I admit I make a pretty poor showing, still, you've got me wrong—"

"No," said Dr. Poteet. "It's not fair to leave it to her. Something she doesn't know—can't know—something you don't know about—" He caught himself, paused, looked confused and was silent.

"I don't think I understand."

"No. Of course you don't. I—a—hadn't intended mentioning it."

"I see."

The minister hesitated. Then a curious light came into his face; he raised his shoulders and dropped them as if ridding them of an irksome load. His nostrils looked suddenly pinched together, his face wan.

"You wouldn't—" He paused, as if measuring the weight of his thought—"you wouldn't want your daughter—you wouldn't want for the husband of your daughter a man who could not even claim—about whose birth there was any question?"

"Dr. Poteet, do you realize what you are saying to me?"

The clergyman turned away. The silence was heavy in the room; the scent of the lilac blossoms provocative.

"By God—"

"Ah!" The older man raised a face of pain. "How else could I make you understand?"

All the details of the room came out in complete clearness: the white marble mantel, the chandelier with crystal drops, the huge mahogany table littered with magazines, the worn place in the rug near the door. A curious ending to an irresponsible afternoon. One could never tell just how a day might turn out. And then the realization came home with stabbing intensity. He took hold of Poteet's arm and partly turned him. "There's only one thing I want to know now. *Do* you realize what you are saying to me?"

"I do. And you'll appreciate I couldn't tell Alma."

"Is it—do you mean to tell me that you believe it to be so?"

"It isn't a question of believing. I was there. I knew your father in Illyria over twenty years ago. It was he who got me this church."

"Because you knew?"

"Partly."

MILTON drew a long, deep breath. He hardly realized why he was doing it; he had an irresistible desire to question—to leave no stone unturned.

"Did you happen to know my mother?" he said after some minutes.

There was a drawn look about the doctor's eyes. "I did."

"And wasn't it possible—didn't my father—attempt to marry her?"

"He couldn't," replied Mr. Poteet. "She was married to another man."

"Oh!"

Then Milton stooped over and picked up his hat; it lay upside down on the floor beside his chair. He stood for a moment, fingering it idly. "Under the circumstances," he said, "I can't quite blame you. No man would want his daughter to have anything to do with me, would he?"

Mr. Poteet looked at him absently.

"I've often wondered," Milton went on, "about certain things. I never quite understood why my father came out here to Goldsboro and built his mill a thousand miles from seaboard. I never understood why he never wanted me even to go back through Illyria. I always used to go to Princeton via Chicago and New York. Funny, isn't it? And the old man got you this church. That's funny, too."

Alma Poteet had quietly entered the room; Milton looked up and saw her standing in the doorway.

"Why," she said, "you two—why, you haven't even opened the shutters." She moved in the direction of the window.

"Don't bother," said Milton. "I was just going."

She turned about and looked at each of them. And then she came up close to Milton's side, peering into his face. "What's the matter? What's gone wrong? Dad, what've you been saying to Milton?"

"I'd been drinking. He was telling me what was expected of me."

She was silent a minute. "Was he? Don't you agree with him?"

"Entirely."

They walked toward the door, Mr. Poteet standing fixed by the mantel.

"And you're not staying? You feel you ought to go, now?" There was the most curious appeal in the girl's face.

"Oh, yes! I ought to go."

They passed on down the hall to the front door.

"Milton! You're not angry? It isn't—you're taking it in the right spirit?"

"Oh, quite! He's entirely right about it."

She sighed.

He opened the door and stepped out into the vestibule. There, half turning, he stood holding his hat. He made no motion to take her hand—to linger an added moment. "Good night," he said.

She watched him go down the walk to the gate in the gathering dusk. She saw him pause a moment and then start off northward in the direction of the city. And she stood there looking through the door, with one hand holding back the flimsy curtain, long after he had passed out of sight.

JOHN CARAWAY'S house was five blocks away, five blocks of arching elms and maples. The square fronts of houses stood projected squat and huge against the sky; between, smooth stretches of lawn shimmered cool in the moonlight. A phonograph played somewhere, its thin scraping melody of a piece with the night. It was warm—softly warm. Off to the north hung a single star, adventuring—a lonely world, and beyond it stretched the night.

There was need for haste; something urged him with a resistless sweep. Just what could be gained by seeing his father? Ah, well, what else was there to do? And he must do something at once. He had the sensation of a thing falling—falling—falling. He stepped from a curbing and a motorcar swept past, fanning his coat skirts. The glare of the headlights meant nothing whatever. Another block and another; voices soft and musically merry from a sun parlor. Witless people who did not know. . . .

Came the glint of moonlight on smooth white columns—a shadowy line of fence posts—a light in a back window—all impersonal. The next moment he was springing up a flight of steps, a vast trembling in his legs. His key stuck in the lock and for a moment the door would not open. Then a gust of stale air—the smell of tobacco smoke—the sudden glare of yellow light.

A door opened; a head thrust through.

"Mr. Caraway here, George?"

"Nossuh. He gone out."

All the haste had been for nothing.

George came through the door and stood inanely. "Yo' suppah ready, Mist' Milt."

"When will he be back? Where did he go, do you know?"

"I don't know. He phone to Miz' Snively long time ergo."

A momentary breath of relief. He had been dreading it, after all. He turned toward the door.

"Ain' you goin' eat no suppah?"

"What? No. Tell Mrs. Snively not to wait. I don't want any."

He stood for a moment on the steps and watched the sweep of the sky. The chimney-pots were gleaming eerily, behind them the wavery blur of tree shapes in motion. Like a stranger he walked slowly down the steps and out through the gate.

He started to walk slowly northward. There was a numbness in his heart. Every now and then a pain would come surging up, and then at once the thought that for the hurt there was nothing to be done. Things just *were*—or were not. That was all. As for the "mother" feature in the business—well, it was strange and unreal, too. The old man had been like a piece of stage setting, he now remembered: standing in the background of his life—something no one ever talked to about things—a sort of black totem pole—a piece of social machinery which he had lately come to regard as an amiable old convention like a horse-drawn vehicle—good stuff in it but out of date. But now this sinister thing! On the face of it, it was preposterous. And then again it wasn't. It caught hold of and strangled his reason with its inevitableness. The breath choked in his chest; the night air was clammy on his forehead. He was a lost creature. All this substance: this place he had felt so much a part of: all his acceptances—what were they now? Merely fictions which he had builded himself, through which his eyes had not penetrated. For an instant he had a blinding flash of himself: a mere wisp of a man—an idea creation built up out of his father's position, his father's wealth, the label which was his father. Of himself—he was nothing. Even Alma—There came a quick, salt stinging into his eyes and then that stone-cold emptiness again.

Unconsciously he had walked several blocks. A short distance ahead shone the lights of Broadway. Beyond them lay the city. Twinkling lights! Hurrying people! All of them meaning something, or thinking they meant something. In a few minutes he was a part of the night crowd. By some metamorphosis everything there seemed changed. There was no one who could do him any harm: he had no more to lose. Nor was there any one who could do him any good. He just didn't matter. And they didn't matter either. They were just so many figures in a dream. From now on he visioned himself—a bleak, chilling picture. He would wander over the earth. He would see and know multitudes of people, their hopes and fears. He would see them in the right perspective, not having any hopes and fears of his own. And when it was all over it would not matter who Milton Caraway was—it wouldn't have mattered, anyway. Perhaps some day some one might observe—might write it in something: "There was something unhappy about that chap—some mystery. He never seemed to give a damn."

MEANTIME, in the private office of the Honorable Max Brille, himself and John Caraway and a certain Alfred O. Altrock were in private conference. The office of Mr. Brille was a small, compact affair, heavily carpeted, with plain mahogany office furniture and a large safe in the north wall, with double doors. In the office the sound of the whirring presses could be heard but faintly. Altrock, who was a squat, bald-headed, swarthy man with a face which looked as if soap and water might effect a definite change in it, was talking in a low tone to his clenched hands on the table.

"It's a cinch no one else is going to bid in the place. Twenty-five thousand is the amount of the mortgage and it's more than anybody else has got to offer, except the company, and all it cares about is to protect its principal. That's all there is to it. Divide it by three—that's eighty-three hundred apiece and we can have it." He paused and glanced up from under his eyebrows without expression and then looked down again. When he came to the end of his sentences his voice did not alter—merely came to the end and stopped. In some ways he was not unlike Caraway; he differed in that his skin was oily as well as dark. And there was little or no hair on his head.

"Well, Jack?" Brille crossed his legs and leaned his elbow on the table. The "Jack" was new for the occasion.

Caraway looked up at him quietly.

"What do you say? Are we in on the split? Eighty-three hundred apiece, did you say, Altrock?"

"Eighty-three hundred."

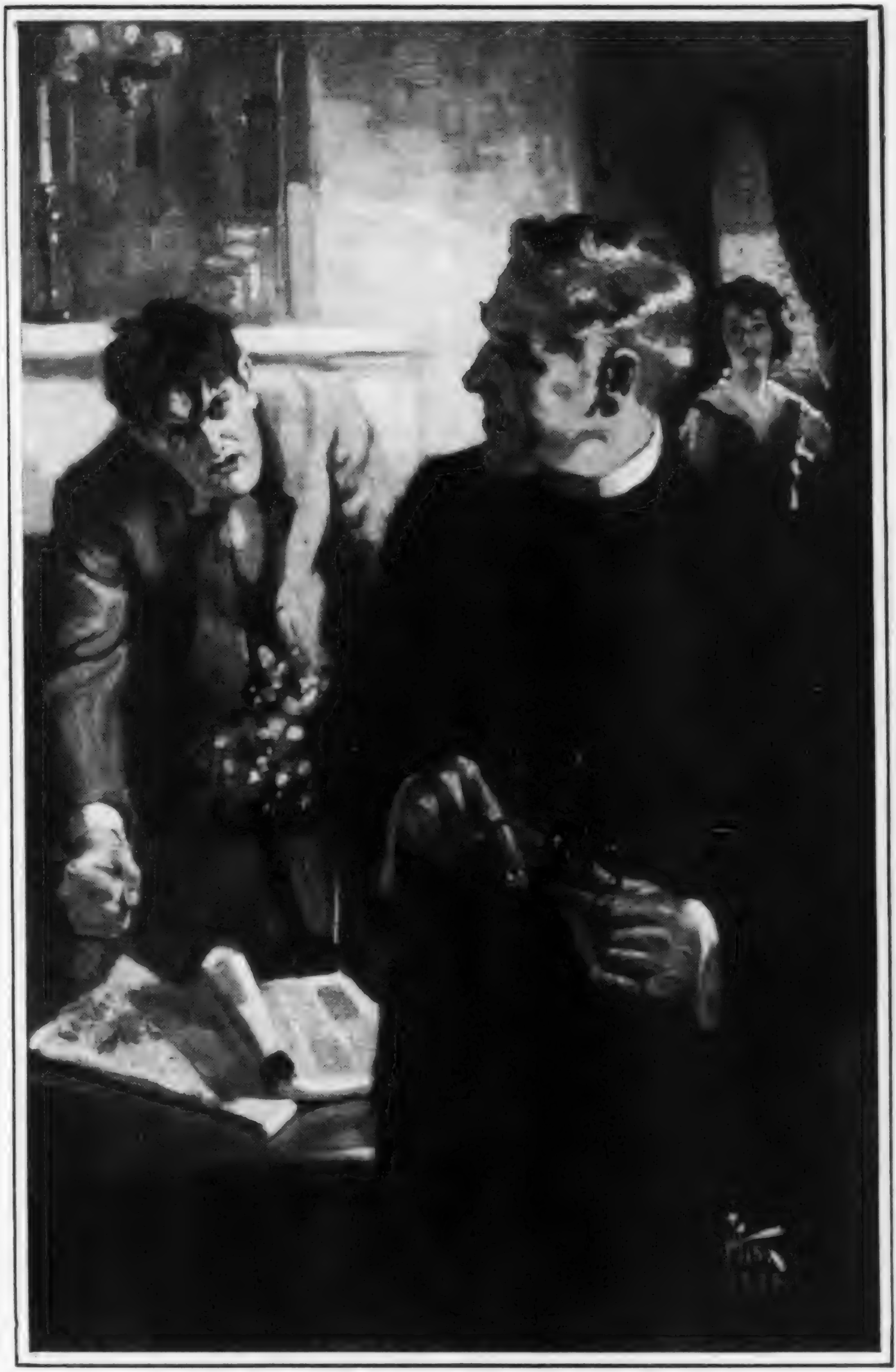
Caraway began to chew his lower lip.

"How much did you put in originally, Jack?" Brille asked.

For a moment Caraway made no reply. He seemed to be thinking. "Seventeen thousand."

Altrock glanced up again. Brille raised his eyebrows.

"Didn't think it was that much. Well, at that—twenty-five grand? Not bad for one-third interest in two thousand acres like them. There's over a thousand in standing timber. Altrock and I will be willing for you to take that off at a rock-bottom price. Then there's eight hundred acres now in cultivation. And the main



"Dr. Poteet, do you realize what you are saying to me?" The older man raised a face of pain.

thing—the oil: you know what the odds are there."

Caraway sat staring off at the wall, the others waiting on him. "What's the idea," he said after a while, "in letting me in on the split? What's to prevent you and Altrock from turning the trick alone?"

"Ah!" Brille's face took on an expression of supreme distaste. "You don't think we ever think of our friends? Part of the great satisfaction in business is the friendly associations one makes. And then you were in the Osceola Company to begin with—you and Altrock."

"Yes. I'm about the only one who could cause you any trouble. The rest of the stockholders are all little fellows. There's Mrs. Bruce, Altrock. She's been bothering you a lot, hasn't she?"

Altrock began to twirl his lead pencil. Caraway laughed softly to himself. "It's been the damnedest nuisance, that company has. Don't know when I've wasted so much time to save so little."

"Well, Altrock, I guess that's about all?" Brille pushed back his chair from the table. There was great satisfaction written in his features. He always looked as if he were directing his inspection into his own heart and its motives, and apparently he found much to please him there. "You'll handle it from the office, I suppose?"

"It's a simple matter. When the time comes I'll call on you."

"Count me out," said Caraway.

The other two looked at him quickly. For some minutes there was no more said.

"Well, Altrock," Brille laughed, and shrugged, "I guess we'd better call it all off. I thought you wanted to spread out a little, Caraway."

"Well, I do and I don't. I'm getting along now—not so spry as I used to be. Got a boy coming along. Leave the struggle for him. I'm content to rest on my oars now."

Brille caught another quick look at Altrock. "That's all the more reason," he said. "You need all the timber acreage you can get, if your mill is going to continue to operate."

"Yes, I know. But let him find that out and settle his own problems."

The confidential air of the meeting seemed to have dissipated as Altrock got slowly to his feet.

BRILLE, flushing down into his collar, frowned and waved his hand. "There's nothing wrong about it. Foreclosing on a mortgage long overdue? What's the matter with you?"

Caraway likewise rose to his feet. "Let Altrock's insurance company do its own foreclosing. You and I have nothing to do with it. Come on, Brille. Get out your Scotch. I'm dry."

With one more look at him and without another word Brille got up and walked out of the room.

While he was away the other two men seated themselves on opposite sides of the table, each seemingly unconscious of the other's presence.

"What was the idea of letting Brille in on this, Altrock?" Caraway spoke in a low tone.

Altrock glanced at the door. "I've personal reasons." And then he gazed reflectively at his hands.

"Well, I advise you to forget it. Not that I will let anything out. There's too many little estates mixed up in the deal—widow and orphan stuff. Lay off."

Altrock glanced up again shiftily, first at Caraway and then at the door. "He's got it fixed up about that. Besides, the stock I hold in the Osceola Company is my own—in my name. If we foreclose, it all goes to the boys—the insurance outfit. Where would I come in?"

Caraway shrugged his shoulders and Brille came back into the office carrying a tall brown bottle.

A search in the table drawers produced some small glasses. These were filled and passed around. The tension of the meeting seemed to have been relieved. Caraway, tilting back his chair, stared at the ceiling, and a quizzical smile hovered about his mouth. He sipped his whisky thoughtfully, enjoying each sip. After a while he restored his chair to its four legs and set his empty glass upon the table. "That safe over there, Brille"—pointing with an indefinite wave of the hand—"where you keep all the stuff on us poor common devils?"

"What do you mean?" Brille shoved a glass of ice-water over toward him. "Oh, that's all poison talk. I've been in the newspaper business in this town nineteen years. A man can't do that without making a few enemies. What do you mean, 'stuff on you'?"

Caraway stood up. "The file cabinet. You know what the boys say? You've got the whole town card-indexed. Altrock and I would like to know what you've got us down for, eh, Altrock?"

Altrock raised a face and a grin that were far from happy.

"That safe is no different from any other. I keep my own personal effects in there. The securities—and other valuables, of course—are in the big one downstairs."

The three moved slowly toward the door.

"I'm disappointed in you, Caraway. I needn't add that this shouldn't go any further? We'll drop the whole matter. But why the hell you should— Why, you'll lose your seventeen thousand and Altrock here—"

"Yep. But I'm getting to be an old man, Brille. I've made enough to satisfy me. Let the young chaps get out and do the rustling, you know. My business is on a sound basis. I don't owe any money. My boy is home now and says he will start out with me pretty soon. What's the use?"

"Well," said Brille, dismissing the matter, "you said last summer on that fishing trip you'd like to go into some things with me. I merely thought—well, Altrock, see you again. Good night, Caraway."

Caraway and Altrock went down the darkened stairs together. On gaining the pavement they observed that the night was still clear and that stars were shining. They stood there together for a moment in silence.

"You going to bring that foreclosure, Altrock?"

For a moment Altrock said nothing. Then he cleared his throat. "It's already started," he said.

A boy running along the sidewalk caused them to step apart. Again they stood in silence.

"Well, good night, Altrock. Luck to you."

HOURS later the clerk at the Cavendish looked up and saw a man enter the lobby and come toward him. He seemed a listless, aimless sort of chap, though he wore the better sort of clothes and you couldn't fool the clerk on what he called "class." But his shoes were covered with dust and there was a certain lost expression in his face and a sag in his bearing that went as a rule with hotel undesirables.

He came and leaned on the desk. He looked at the registry book and at the pile of Tourist Bureau circulars at the corner and at the little dish of shot in which the pens were stuck. And then he stared aimlessly off at the ceiling.

"Yes, sir?"

"Miss Ledoux? Or maybe you've got her down as McGrath."

"Gone out," said the clerk shortly. He looked up at the clock, and at his glance the visitor turned and looked up at it, too.

"Has she— Is the show over?"

The clerk busied himself straightening the desk. "Oh, yes! A half-hour ago. She went out with some gentleman."

"Oh!" Still he made no move to go.

"Any message?"

The visitor passed his hand across his mouth. "Yes. What? Oh, no! Just tell her I was—I had nothing to do and dropped in."

"And the name?"

But the young man had turned away and was walking slowly across the lobby toward the door.

THE Caraway mills were the boast of Goldsboro. It was the one industry of the town with a cosmopolitan flavor. Trainloads of mahogany logs cut square and with rounded edges would come from the lumber camps of Africa and Central America and be piled in colossal stacks along the railroad switch. They stood out in the morning sunlight in all their somber gray clumsiness like a giant's building blocks discarded for the moment. The whine of the band saws filled the air. One could see them from the gate in a barnlike structure with a gable roof and with one wall left open, perched some forty or fifty feet above the ground. An endless cogway was climbing along a chute to this eminence and every now and then a log would thrust its head from another shed on the ground and slowly begin to climb to the top where, after a tedious and jerky progress, it would straighten out like a serpent passing over the brow of the hill and be seen no more. Far to the westward stood the drying racks: saw-horse arrangements wherein reposed bright yellow and red boards mellowing in the sun; and to the north stretched the low roof of the panel plant. A tiny locomotive on a narrow-gauge track came snorting along and disappeared into another shed. These buildings were all gray and corrugated, and there was a noticeable lack of men moving about in the yards.

Up the main gravel roadway Milton Caraway came. His shoes and the hems of his trousers were caked with mud and dust. There was a drawn look about his face and an incipient stubble on his chin, but he was walking briskly, his eyes set with an appraising stare on the bright yellow, one-story office. Up the steps he walked, into the small lobby where a girl sat at a telephone desk and switchboard. Behind the girl was a mahogany-and-glass partition and behind the partition there was the sound of industry: typewriters clicking, the shuffle of feet, the buzz of voices. Milton nodded to the girl and turned to a door on the right that bore no sign. He opened the door and went in.

There was a flat-topped mahogany desk in the center of the room, and in the corner an old-fashioned bookcase with green-baize curtains stretched acrosss swinging doors: the only other furniture was a worn sofa and a few straight-backed chairs.

Milton glanced about the room and then sat down in one of these. Near his hand on the desk was a large pad of writing paper. He reached over for it and began to pick off the mucilage from the bound edge in little flakes, dropping them to the floor.

For some minutes he sat quietly, staring at the desk before him, and the sunlight came through the east window and lay on the Wilton carpet in a brilliant yellow patch. Directly he tossed the tablet over on the desk and it slid across the top and fell to the floor on the other side. And at that moment voices were heard through the door beyond and then some one was turning the knob. He sat and watched it closely.

The door opened and Caraway Senior's bulky form appeared, holding it back with arm outstretched. Another man was entering, a tall, lean man with a thin, bronzed face and grizzled hair, and beyond them there was the momentary view of some men seated at desks, and piles of papers. Milton, pushing back his chair, stood up as the tall man came forward, looking at him inquiringly.

Caraway Senior closed the door. "You here?" he said to Milton shortly. "Anderson, this is my son Milton."

They shook hands.

"Sit down. Forbes was saying that those rates were merely tentative—in effect until all the data are in. Now, the thing you want to do . . . " There followed a maze of instructions and technical talk, and Milton turned away his eyes and gazed out of the window.

Over beyond the fence was a country road and along the road was a row of trees and below them a hedge. An automobile was passing and a cloud of white dust followed it slowly. Still farther toward the east rose the brow of a hill, the dirt all brown and cool; a farmer was plowing along the crest, so that for a moment man and beasts stood out in silhouette against the sky. A little gust of wind came and blew back the curtains of the room so that papers rustled, and Caraway Senior got up and shut the window. Milton looked at the brown man again. He had a prognathous jaw and a bristly bit of stubble on his upper lip and the back of his hand which lay on the arm of the chair was covered with yellow hair—lighter, much, than the skin beneath it. He was listening attentively to his superior.

A young clerk came into the office, a young man with a terribly serious face, and John Caraway got up, excused himself, and followed him out of the office.

The tall, brown man got up and walked over to the wall and inspected a picture. It was a long, narrow picture of a series of logging scenes. He bent over and peered at it.

"Belize," he said casually.

"Belize," he repeated after an interval. "Loading docks—Honduras. Ever been there?"

"No," said Milton. "I never have. There's some interesting ones over there"—pointing to the other wall. "Axim. One there of them bringing in a leopard. In the center there."

The man stepped across the room. "Yes," he said. "I remember. I'm in the picture."

MILTON glanced up and viewed the long, narrow back. "Then you're Shorty Anderson."

The man turned about. He was smiling;

there were wrinkles about his eyes and his teeth were very white. "Yes, I'm Shorty. Last time I saw you, you were just going off to prep school. That was in 1914."

"Yes, I remember."

The smile slowly left Anderson's face and he came and sat down in the chair by the table and began to drum with his fingers. Milton caught him glancing at his shoes.

"I remember the war had just started and you didn't know whether you'd reach Axim or not," Milton said quietly.

"Yes. I went by way of Japan."

Another silence.

"Been home since?"

"No, this is the first time."

Silence again and the sober-faced boy again entered the office and laid a file of papers on the desk.

"Much fun in Axim?"

Anderson looked up quickly but Milton's face was somber—turned away. "Not exactly—not what you'd usually call fun. Every now and then there's a ruckus and it's entertaining gettin' things back to normal. No, not much fun. Y'see, for three years I was the only white man in the station. And then in 1917 Diefenbach came. Didn't think he'd stay, but it was the safest place for him—"

"You been there ever since?"

"Except two trips to Madeira."

"H'm!"

Anderson got in a sidelong glance and a little later twisted in his chair. Then he stifled a yawn.

"What do you do to pass the time?"

"Passes itself. There's plenty to do—gettin' out the timber—dealin' out supplies. We hunt a little—and fish."

"Yeah?"

"Dief's got a fiddle. You ought to see him some evenin' when the sun is droppin' into the sea—all blood-red—and the forest behind is black as ink. He takes his fiddle and marches up and down the beach and the niggers come and follow him up and down like so many dogs. Not one of 'em will touch it."

"Black magic, eh?"

Anderson caught another look at him and then he smiled, his teeth showing sharply white between his lips.

Again a silence.

"Going back?"

"No." He got up and went to the window and looked out. "They're movin' me to Belize. That's why I'm here."

"Spiggoties instead of niggers. Camp in Belize is in the sticks, too, isn't it?"

"Oh, it's not bad! I get restless here; always waitin' for something to happen."

"And it never does? Who's going to Africa in your place?"

"Don't know. That's where the trouble is. They had a man, but at the last minute he backed down—suddenly developed family ties."

"And they're bad to mix with Axim?"

"I'll say! Wouldn't mind goin' back only I think it's time to change. That chapter's finished."

"Yes. You've got to dig out of your ruts."

Anderson shot him a look and then the door opened and Caraway Senior came in again. He was chewing on the end of a cigar. "No," he said, "that was a bad lead, too. Parker said he thought young Allen might do, but he doesn't want to go."

He sat down in his desk chair and stared off at the wall. "What's getting into all the young fellows nowadays? They all want to be bond salesmen, and those we do get all have to have nice fancy jobs and drive cars and belong to country clubs. Why, twenty years ago—" He paused and looked steadily at Milton, shifted his cigar to the other corner of his mouth, grunted and then opened the file of papers.

"Anderson," he said after a moment, "no need to keep you here. Nothing more we can do today. Might as well go back to your hotel. Come back in the morning."

Anderson stood up and Milton likewise. "Good luck!" said the latter, and smiled. "You don't want some one to play the fiddle for you in Central America, do you?"

"Sure I would. You'd get so you'd like it." They shook hands. "See you again?"

"Perhaps," said Milton.

Anderson left the room.

WHEN Milton turned around to his father the latter was leaning back in his chair and staring out of the window, a frown on his face. Then, apparently coming to some private conclusion, he grunted and returned to the perusal of the file of papers. "Anything on your mind?"

"Yes."

Caraway Senior looked up. "Want to

go to Gold Coast as the agent of the Company?"

"I might."

The old man grunted again, and again took up the sheaf of correspondence. "What is the question you wanted to ask me?"

"Were you and my mother ever married?"

The old man sat perfectly still and the color slowly died in his face. He started to speak and his voice was as dry as dust. He cleared his throat. "You can think of the damnedest questions."

Milton sat and watched him. After a moment in which the silence was the most impressive thing in the room he rose to his feet. "Well," he said in a thin, fine voice, "I naturally supposed you would be the most authentic—"

"Sit down," said Caraway Senior. There was an odd look in his face.

Milton did so.

"Who's been talking to you?"

Milton got up again. "It's a delicate situation to find oneself in, and you'll pardon me if I feel that conversation is superfluous. It isn't necessary for you to talk about it."

The old man sat and stared at his hands. When he looked at Milton there was terrific pain in his eyes—a dull, hunted look. "That why you didn't come home last night?"

"Wouldn't be surprised."

"You—" He paused and lifted his hand and stared at it. "There's dirt on your trousers." A little whistling noise came through his nose.

Milton laughed. "Pretty stiff dose, isn't it, Governor? You know, I've the strangest feeling about it. I don't know if I ought to thank you for my existence or commiserate with you on your hard luck. You see, it's a bit awkward. I'm not acquainted with the circumstances."

The old man was staring at him; his breathing was labored. "I've tried to make it up to you."

"Sure you have. You've been a pretty good sport, I'll say. I've got no kick coming. Well, let's go to the house. It's quieter there. You can tell me what kind of a time you had keeping it dark all these years."

John Caraway was staring at him, could not speak.

"There's some arrangements we'll have to make, I suppose, to keep people from—"

"Milton!" The old man's eyes grew staring. He clutched at his side and then he toppled over in his chair and slid to the floor.

Milton sprang up and stood over him. He was fumbling in his waistcoat pocket and his face was distorted with pain, his eyes closed. The boy felt in the pocket and drew out a small ampulla of amber liquid.

"Handkerchief," whispered Caraway.

Milton broke the glass and held the saturated cloth to his father's nose, and then of a sudden the room was filling with people, and the old man opened his eyes again.

"Put him on the sofa," some one said. And they were lifting him and carrying him across the room.

Milton watched them dispassionately. It was as if his consciousness had drifted off a short distance and was watching himself standing there.

Directly he went over to the sofa and touched a man on the shoulder. The man turned around.

"What's the matter with him?" said Milton.

"Heart. He's had them before. You'd better get a doctor."

"Yes," said Milton. "Somebody had better send for a doctor."

His father's shoes pointing ceilingward there on the sofa were grotesque. They had such broad, stubby toes. . . .

IT WAS nearing noon as the Reverend Abner Poteet walked into the office of the Caraway Lumber Company. For a moment he seemed uncertain as to the procedure, but after looking about him he walked up to the telephone desk and spoke to the girl there in a low tone. She smiled at him absently, switched on a plug, and repeated the question through the mouthpiece. Then she turned to the clergyman with her smile. "First door on the right."

Poteet walked over to the door and opened it. Before him at a desk John Caraway sat, his hands resting on the flat top, fingers extended. As the door opened he looked up and Poteet met his vacant gaze.

Without speaking, Poteet went over and sat down in a chair near the window. As the legs screaked on the hardwood floor border, Caraway seemed to become aware of him for the first time. He moved his head suddenly and blinked his eyes. And then he looked at Poteet again.

It was lost on the clergyman, who, from obvious appearance, was concerned with the state of things in his own mind. He cleared his throat, glanced at Caraway, and then out of the window.

"John," he said, "I've done a terrible thing."

Caraway was still staring at him uncomprehendingly.

"I've come to feel that I no longer am fit for the position God has given me to fill. I'm—" He could not finish. Two fat, round tears hung in his eyes.

"H'm!" Caraway cleared his throat. "What the hell is the matter with you now?"

"I told Milton—" He paused.

"Well? Told him what? You have a hell of a time with your conscience. If I were you I'd get rid of it. Causes you too much grief. What's on your mind?"

A fine light of determination came into the divine's countenance. "John Caraway, I'm not fit to walk the streets a free man. I'm not fit to stand in the pulpit and preach God's word. I don't know that I'm any better qualified to determine what *is* God's word."

Caraway in impatience opened a drawer and began to rummage for something. Poteet paused and watched him with desperate eyes.

"I've—I've told Milton about the Bates woman—his mother."

Caraway looked up quickly. And then a far-away, absent expression came into his face. For a moment he sat thus. Then he got up quickly and went to the door.

"Leave a call at the Melrose Hotel for Mr. Anderson," he said to the girl. "Have him call me."

He came back and sat down. Poteet was watching his every move. "Well," he began after a moment, "it's all the price of my damn foolishness. I hadn't any business bringing you with me. But I was afraid you'd blab if I left you behind. So I was up against it. Shouldn't ever have told you in the first place. Every man's a damn fool sometime in his life."

Poteet's eyes dropped and he sat silently staring at his hands. Suddenly Caraway laughed dryly and Poteet could hear him bustling about with the contents of his desk drawer.

"He wanted to—he and Alma have got up an affair. They're in love with each other."

"Ho! Well, what's unusual in that? What's that got to do with it?"

POTEET closed his mouth in a grim line. The perspiration was standing out in little beads on his forehead and he stared through the window, as a man seeing a vision. On the brow of the hill across the road the farmer in the field was unhitching his team. He came driving them before him by the reins.

"No," said Poteet, "it's got nothing to do with it." He spoke with grave effort. "But it might influence Milton. There's no telling. I've been in a way a murderer. I've killed something I had no right to kill."

His face as he stared across the open field was set in tragic lines; the calm serenity had left his brow and pain sat there instead. Behind him a silence settled upon the room. Through the partition the click of the typewriters could be heard faintly. And then Caraway began to talk—in a quiet, measured voice.

"You don't need to worry about Milton. Not that it lightens the burden of your damnable villainy. Milton's not that sort. He'll stand the gaff. Just give him time."

Poteet looked back into the room but not at Caraway.

"It's no news to me about him and your daughter. He told me. But if they want each other—why, what's the odds? Listen, Poteet!" He leaned across the desk. "That was why you told him, wasn't it?"

Poteet's lips were twitching.

"Well, you see how damn little the conventions amount to when human lives are considered. You're sorry as hell you told him, aren't you? If you'd kept still nobody would ever have been the wiser."

"There's no need of its going any further," Poteet broke in at once. "I'll not—"

"No. Not that I know of. Of course, one can never tell. But there's no reason to think about such things."

Poteet expelled his breath from his chest with a deep sigh.

"Now you get out of here. You go on about your business and forget it. That boy will look out for himself. I'm going to send him on a trip. Does Alma—does your daughter know?"

Poteet rose to his feet. "No, of course not. She's unhappy about things. But she doesn't know why."

"Well, you leave her alone."

Slowly they walked to the door. Poteet put out his hand uncertainly—with a question in his eyes that pleaded for something. Caraway took the hand as a matter of course. He put his other hand on Poteet's shoulder and gently pushed him.

"I've always told you the world would be better off without so many of you talkers. You've not got anything to do but talk. Why in hell don't you get out in your garden or in the shops somewhere and work some of that stuff out of you?"

Poteet's jaw set firmly and he walked out of the office without a word.

Caraway came back to the desk. He sat down heavily in his chair. He stared at the polished surface of the desk before him—the top covered with a glass plate to save the scratches. For a while he appeared to be listening. And then he went to the door again.

"Miss Tully," he called, "have my car sent up right away. Have they located Mr. Riggs at the Agency yet? . . . Well, have him call my house—in, say, fifteen minutes."

AS MILTON entered the office of the *Daily Clarion* the hands of the clock pointed to two and twelve. Benson, the sports editor, came hurrying past him, a sheaf of papers under his arm, a scowl of preoccupation on his face. Brown, the city editor, in his shirt-sleeves, leaned back in his chair and glanced at him over his shoulder. "Where in hell have you been, Caraway? What do you think this is? A Jew picnic? Come whenever you get ready?"

His tone was fierce, but the look which he gave Milton was humorous and kindly. The speech had been largely for the benefit of the staff which lolled about coatless and perspiring in the humid June heat. As Milton came nearer, Brown added in a lower tone:

"I've been trying to get your house all morning."

"Sorry," said Milton. "I went on a party yesterday afternoon at three. Last night I went up and had a look at the pumping station. It was still pumping."

"Ha!" Brown was consumed with chuckling. "Here, you bums! What do you think this is—sitting around doing nothing? If you'd get to work maybe you'd learn something and this paper would be some account as a paper. Get up from there, Farley. What are you doing, Trowbridge? What the hell—" The voice trailed away in a grumble. Everybody grinned but nobody stirred. It was the lull before the finish. Brown took another bite out of his sandwich. "Say, Milt!"

Milton came over from his desk.

"What I was 'phoning you about—they're having some kind of an opening around at the Art Academy—or closing—I don't know which. Some celebrity is going to speak at two-thirty. Will you go around and see what it's all about and give me another one of those stories about the Cubists? Haven't anything else to do, have you?"

"No," said Milton.

It was viciously hot—a sort of jungle heat. Beyond the yellow partition the presses were banging away. The vibration shook the whole place. Thin blue smoke hung in sluggish clouds along the ceiling; there was not enough breeze to sweep it through the windows into the alley. The floor was unspeakable: crumpled bits of penciled notes—whole sheets of untouched copy paper fouled by the imprint of shuffling feet—cigarette stubs and fine, powdery ashes everywhere. Large wire waste baskets stood at irregular intervals about the room, but no one ever took the trouble to drop anything into them. It was smelly and so hot that the skin of one's face cried out for air and cool water.

Across from Brown, Henderson, the copy reader, lay with his face on his arms. He was lank and thin, his neck very scraggly. Altwiler, the Associated Press man, balanced his chair on two legs and waved his feet in front of him. Renfrew, one of the younger reporters, a youngster who hoped to make something of his style and was always looking for human interest in the most trivial items and writing them so elaborately that Brown always tossed them into the basket, strolled over to Milton's desk, his hands in his pockets.

"Anything good at the theaters this week?" he asked.

"No," replied Milton.

"I saw Richard Barthemess in a picture

last Friday. Now there's an actor—"

"Yes?" Milton got up from the table, stuffing some paper into his coat pocket. "Yes, Barthelmess is all right, I suppose. I've never seen him. . . . Well, got to hurry."

As he walked out of the door he could hear Brown's funny voice bawling out his juvenile staff. Curious way he had of kidding himself into believing he held down a real job on a real paper. He knew that Brown knew better; but it was good sportsmanship to put up the bluff. And the boys liked him. The humid glare of the afternoon struck him with the force of a blow and he observed the figure of a man coming up the walk toward him. The sun, driving its rays slantwise into his face, made him lower his head and he was on the point of passing when the man stopped.

"Milton! May I see you a moment?"

Milton looked up. "Why, it's the doctor himself. Were you going in there to see me?"

"Yes, I was."

"Well, I'm sorry. But I'll have to be excused. I'm on an assignment and we can't put off such matters. We've got to get our news hot."

Poteet was looking at him gravely. "I'll walk along with you if you don't mind."

"Surely. Come ahead. I'm going out to Twelfth and Race. Fine day—"

Poteet made no reply, and they came to the sidewalk and turned to the left. Milton evinced an elaborate interest in the progress of a huge tractor which was dragging a street scraper behind it.

THEY came to Ellicott Square, a crossing of five streets and a more than usual hazard. Today it was deserted; the streets stretched along, dry, dusty vistas, with little shimmering heat waves rising from the asphalt.

"This is the kind of afternoon a man ought to go naked, eh, doctor? This stuff would just squush up between your toes."

Poteet made no reply.

They were about to gain the opposite curbing when Milton caught a look at him in his torrid black. "Were you ever a missionary, sir?"

"No."

"I'd think every dominie would want to take a try at it sometime. Just to round out his experience. This heat made me think of it."

"A man doesn't have to go to the tropics to get a mission," Poteet replied gravely. "There's plenty to do here—in any large city."

"Yes. I suppose so. Man unregenerate and unwashed." Milton was lighting a cigarette. "You don't use them, doctor?"

"No—no, thank you. Milton, I wanted to tell you in a measure how much I regret what happened yesterday. I—a—I can't express my feelings about it to you. I —a—"

"Yes," Milton interrupted him, "I can imagine." They were crossing another street and had to stop for a tramcar which came bouncing along, clanging its bell.

"Milton!" Poteet had paused. His face showed exquisite pain. "All I want to tell you is: Try and get the viewpoint of your father, if you can. It'll make his position clearer and more tenable to you, perhaps. And it will take your mind off yourself."

Milton looked levelly into his eyes. "Thank you, doctor. Don't worry. The Governor and I are on the best of terms. You see we are getting away from a lot of those fine old conventions you were raised on. They don't really matter. It's the spirit behind them—that's all."

The doctor seemed uncertain of this.

"Of course, doctor, I couldn't expect you to take so liberal a view of the digressions in my case as to excuse them. But then you must not expect me to blame myself too much for it."

"You think of your father."

With this final adjuration Poteet stepped off the curbing into the street. Directly opposite was the public library. Milton watched the robust figure climb the long, hot steps—he could be seen from some distance because the library street at this juncture ran at an angle to the street on which he was walking.

VOICES were sounding in the hall of the Art Academy. A moment later four well-dressed ladies entered and Milton was introduced.

They took him into the lecture room where a small but very select crowd had already gathered.

"We're awfully fortunate," one of them

said to him, "in having Mr. Blumschein talk to us this afternoon."

"What's it about?"

"Oh, hadn't you heard? It's on—Margie, what's the lecture about? Oh, yes! Why, 'Principles of Modern Art.' I suppose you got to see everything during your year abroad. Did you get up into Prague and Vienna? The Wienewerkstaats or something like that—they are there."

"No. I've never been to Prague."

They were standing at the door and every now and then a woman in the audience would smile and nod to his companion.

She suddenly lapsed into a serious mood. "I really think," she went on in an undertone, "that Goldsboro has got the right idea—going right after these artists and developing an artistic consciousness among the people."

"Yes. It's very helpful."

"Don't you think so, really? People have been blinded by conventions so long, they think that everything has to be snug and tight in the same little old rut. I was reading just the other day somewhere—it was a splendid article—that the public wants only pretty thing—nice things. Whereas art seeks to find the true feeling in everything, whether it's pretty or not. That is the lesson we are trying to teach the public in Goldsboro by hanging such pictures in the public gallery." There was an ardent light in her pretty face.

"It's fine," agreed Milton. "It's all very interesting. I don't suppose any of the colony advocates free love or anything like that?"

The woman blushed and would not look at him. "Now you're making fun of us. I suppose after Europe, we all look pretty old-fashioned and conventional."

Milton murmured an unintelligible reply. The lecture was beginning and he had to find a seat.

For two hours the diversion persisted. There was rapt attention. Woman has the capacity for immolation on any available altar. The wizened lecturer with the burning eyes was no apprentice. He knew there was no need to strive for the interest of his audience; it was his for the asking. He merely involved himself in a perfect rat's nest of a theme and every one was supremely happy. Just to the left of the room was a small open court with a tiny fountain and a couple of flowering shrubs in earthenware tubs. For a few minutes the slanting sun rays came and powdered the place with fine gold—a faint, but pervading odor of lilacs hung in the air; there was that breathless suspense of spring—youth, rebirth, hope—life. He was visioning a garden, a grass plot fringed about with trees and the sunlight playing in the middle. There came the patter of hand-claps; the ladies were acknowledging a tribute to their understanding.

Milton slipped away, out of the side door, and made his way back toward the office.

HE CAME to Broadway. He turned and went east. He overtook Alma Poteet, hurrying along. Before he had realized it he was alongside and she was looking at him with that deep-set glance of hers.

"What have you been doing?"

He told her.

They walked along in silence and he suddenly wished that he had not seen her—had taken another street.

They crossed Ellicott Square. Suddenly she looked up at him—levelly and gravely. "You've hurt my feelings."

"Yes? I'm sorry."

"After what you said to me—told me—to do what you did—I'm a silly fool to have believed you."

"Oh!" He remembered now—knew of what she was talking. "Yes. Perhaps you were."

She bit her lip and walked along in silence, eyes straight to the front. "Dad has been terribly upset. You know he's old-fashioned." Yes, her cheeks were redder and that was a funny way to slope a feather. It gave a piquant dash—a touch of naughtiness. A poignant beauty in the youth of her.

"Yes. I know. I'm sorry. It's all over and done for, I guess."

"How do you mean?" Wide-eyed, she turned the question on him. Moisture beaded her lashes.

"Oh, that other—what I told you in the garden. It's not worth bothering about. Nothing is."

"Oh, but, Milton—"

"Were you going in here? Well—see you later, maybe."

He did not look back; she might have

been looking after him and that would have made matters worse. He ran into Lonny Cox and Henry Deems at the next corner. They encircled him with their arms. They dragged him into their car. They drove four miles out into the country. They drank the entire contents of a square bottle of gin. He forgot he had to report on "The Principles of Modern Art." He forgot that Goldsboro was a conventional place. He forgot that the romantic beauty in life lay in its denial. But the thing that lay in his heart—that remained.

SOME hours later he stood before the door of Miss McGrath in the Cavendish Hotel. Through the window at the end of the hall the moonlight came, lay on the floor in a pallid patch. He knocked.

A voice bade him enter.

He pushed the door open. As it swung slowly inward the faint glow of a lamp was evident. And then he saw her sitting at the desk, in a flame colored neglige, its rich color where the lamplight touched it in flaming contrast with opulent shadows in the folds. As he opened the door she pushed her writing back into the desk and drew the wrap together at her throat.

"Anybody home?"

"Oh, it's you!" She turned again and pushed up the lid of the desk, closing it.

"I want to come in."

"Help yourself. Sit down. How'd you get up?"

He walked over to an armchair and flung himself into it. "I worked the self-starter. Always was a wiz about machinery. I remembered that the room was on the third floor."

She sat watching him. She had let go her hold on the flaps of the robe, apparently with no futher concern about it. Her neck and bosom, although in shadow, seemed creamily white; there was a suggestion of rich fulness. He could not keep his eyes off her for long, the clinging sleekness of the silk, the play of light and shadow, the imperfect revelation giving rise to a far headier suggestion. There was a reserve in her manner too—he was not certain that she was pleased.

She dropped her eyes and turned away. "I didn't expect to see *you* again."

"You didn't? Well, you never can tell. What made you think that?"

"Oh, a lot of things."

"You mean that chap that was up here the other night?"

"Block? Maybe. You ran away and left me to sink." There was a coolness in her regard—a light indifference.

"Well, what's on tonight?"

"This—my nightie. I'm going to bed."

"Oh!" He got up restlessly, walked to the window and drew back the curtains. Suddenly he turned upon her. "What's the use of that? Come on. Let's go somewhere."

She made no move. "Everything's closed up."

"Oh, I don't mean that sort of thing. Who wants to go into one of those rabbit holes and listen to a lot of hams sing mammy songs? I've got a car outside and it's a fine large night. Let's go somewhere."

He came and stood before her, leaned upon her chair, the poison of an unusual excitement throbbing in his veins; it burned in his eyes.

"I'm tired."

At that he dropped down on the arm of her chair. "Come on. What does that matter? Let's go somewhere. Didn't you ever get the hunch to get on a train without ever knowing where it was going? Let's do something."

She raised her arms and crossed them behind her head, looking up into his face with a lazy, cynical smile. The sleeves of the kimono slipped away; her flesh, in the dim, ruddy glow of the lamp, was as sleek and smooth as silk. "Where'd you get it?"

He had been staring off toward the window. Suddenly he threw out his hand, gazing raptly in thought.

"I'd like to have an ancient barge with purple drapes and hangings and a striped awning and go floating with you down a tropic river through the solitudes—with only the splash of the hippos and the alligators sliding off the bank. We'd sip Lethe and nepenthe from tall green chalices and I'd have dull gold bands about those arms—and your ankles. And a circlet of topaz about your hair. I would start out with you on milk-white Arabian steeds, to ride a thousand miles under the stars across the lonely white sands with the night winds rushing down from the heavens and the stillness of God. Or I'd choose to squat with you in some temple of Buddha and smell the rank incense and get our skins all prickly and wet—and drowse and drowse until the spirit of ten thousand years of death and decay and futility should come and bind our foreheads with dull bands of pain. That's life!"

"You've got ambition." She laughed. "Why didn't you bring some up, you tightwad?"

"Ambition? No, it's not ambition. It's you. Don't you know it? It's you!" He slipped his hands beneath the silken folds of her wrap, encompassing her neck. Thoughtfully and with deliberate contemplation he did it. "You're a beautiful thing, Bernice."

"Bernice! Where do you get the 'Bernice'?" Her tone was just a bit strident, but she offered no resistance when he took hold of her chin and tipped back her face. Her eyes wavered before his.

Suddenly he released her and sprang to his feet. "Bernice? Oh, I think of you as Bernice—Bernice of the night-black hair. Bernice!"

HE STRODE to the window and stood there with his back to her, his hands in his pockets. "It's like a spark of fire in my brain. To take you just as you are out into the night and never come back." He did not turn, made no effort to impress her with this elaborate desire. In a way it was as if he had been speaking to himself.

Silence came over the room. He stood motionless, staring out of the window across a dim and irregular stretch of roofs. Above shimmered a ruddy glow of haze shot through with lamplight. A cluster of chimney-pots, black and solitary, emitted a silent ribbon of smoke into the sky. And beyond them winked and gleamed the distant stars.

He heard her moving behind him and directly she came and slid an arm through his. She pressed her cheek against his sleeve. "Go ahead—shoot your stuff."

For a moment he was silent. "See that star—the bright one—just to the left of the chimney?"

"All right. And then what?"

"Know what it is?"

She laughed. "It's Venus de Milo or Aphrodite—or maybe it's Jane Cowl. I don't know. I haven't got my specs."

"No. It's Betelgeuse. Did you ever hear of Betelgeuse?"

"No. Can't say that I have." She pulled her drapes about her. "What did he do?"

"I don't know how many million miles it is away. But it's so big you could put the sun in the center of it and revolve the earth about the sun just as it does now without ever touching the sides."

"Some trip! And then what?"

"Do you suppose it matters what happens to you or me? Do you suppose it makes any difference what you do or I do to the chief engineer that runs that system?"

"Sure, no, dearie! Go as far as you like."

"Suppose for instance that I should decide I wanted to carry you off, and in order to do it in style I should rob a bank and sink a ship, bash a few policemen. It would only be a light diversion."

"Oh, sure!"

"Oh, it sounds crazy! I don't know—but what I'm getting at is that men and women worry themselves sick over things that don't matter. You know?"

"Well, we've all got to eat."

"It's other things. I got to thinking about my—a certain chap's place in Gold Coast. A fellow was telling me all about it and I've been thinking about it—"

"Where's Gold Coast? In Hollywood?"

"No, not exactly. It's in Africa—thousands of miles from all this."

"Why all the distance?"

"Oh, the farther the better. I was just wondering what it would be like to take some one like you to a place like that and work things out—"

"And slide off the banks with the hippos and the alligators?"

"It's as clear in my mind. There's a long stretch of beach—white, sandy beach. And the sea comes rolling upon it with feathery white breakers. And when the sun sets in the sea the water gets blood-red and the sand all rosy pink. And every evening there's a man—a white man—in white drill clothes—comes and walks along the beach in the fading sunlight and playing a violin. And the black people—scores and scores of them—all quite naked—come and march along behind him, Indian file—"

She laughed softly, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "Go on. Let me know when you come to the Turkish bath."

"And behind them stretches the forest, all blue and dark and waving softly." He held out his hand, pointing across the roofs. "And gradually the sun sinks into the sea, a great flaming ball and then, bang!—the light goes out and all there is is the vast sweep of sky and a host—a host of stars and the murmur of the surf—never, never still." He reached out and drew her forward, his arm encircling her shoulder, and as he did so she shivered just a little.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing. It's just this, Bernice: when things get so muddled— Well, you see what a place like that means? We've only got a few tiny years to live, a few years which beside the eternities of time are no more than the cycle of a midge—a night-fly. And men spend it with their faces in the mire. They've got souls like roaches. All they can see is to scuttle about in the dirt and fill their little bellies. Listen! You think maybe that all this talk is crazy. But what I'm getting at is this: there's none of us knows what's right and what's wrong. Just look out there at that star and say so. Nothing matters unless it's right in here." He tapped his chest. "Unless it's right in here, there's no applause can compensate."

SHE drew away from him, moved back into the room. "Hush a minute. Wait. Did any one see you come up?"

"No. What's the difference if they did?"

She switched on the light. He turned and saw her looking at the watch on her wrist and as she did so she glanced up at him. "It's after twelve."

"Is it?" He walked thoughtfully over toward the door. "I've a car downstairs. Listen! Let's get in and go—just go some where. There's a place I know forty miles from here back in the Indian Hills with a great cliff facing the east and a gorge all black with pines—a cup-shaped valley and way down in the valley a little town. To see that place at sunrise—see the breakfast fires begin to send their smoke-streams heavenward—hear the world awaken—"

"I've got to work tomorrow."

"Yes, I know. You can say that about every tomorrow. It's the different one that never comes. Come on."

He looked at her and she at him. There seemed to be a gulf between, somehow. But she was very lovely with the lamplight behind her, gleaming on her hair. And there was something lonely about her too, an inaccessibility. She had been facing her facts alone. Abruptly he put out his hands and drew her to him. He crushed her up against his breast. And even then, as he looked down into her eyes, they were unfathomably cool. He paused.

"Well?"

"I'll take you with me, Bernice—if you want to go."

"Go? Go where? What's the rush?"

"Anywhere. Somewhere where there's just wind and tide and sea and stars; with no one to whisper right and wrong, no ifs and buts; only life and death. It's a little thing we've got—this life of ours. And I'm not going to let anybody cramp and blind it for me—nor for you either, if you'll only say so."

Her body suddenly stiffened. She drew slightly away from him. He could hear a clock ticking somewhere. And then some one was suddenly rattling the doorknob. Ledoux was watching it. Some one wanted to get in. He stood and wondered what she would do. Here was that curious dim room, with a couple of cheap French prints on the wall, the little mahoganized desk with the woman's gloves on top. This was the kind of thing that got people in trouble, that made certain newspaper articles. A sudden, chilling misgiving came and crowded away all other things.

Ledoux stepped to the door. She turned back the night latch. The door swung inward. In the hall stood a policeman and a clerk of the hotel.

"What's going on in here?"

Ledoux stepped back, folding her robe about her. For a moment she was silent; she did not look at Milton at all. "He's drunk," she said.

The policeman looked at her with a quick and appreciative glance. And then he stepped forward and took Milton by the arm.

"Come on. I've got you. You're the bird I've been lookin' for for a coupla weeks. Well, tell the lady good night."

Milton looked up quickly from the officer to Ledoux and then away. The policeman was not going to take her. The clerk stood in the hallway and stared his fill—big, greedy frightened eyes. The place suddenly changed to a sordid, dirty little second-class hotel; the faces about him were merely flat, fatuous masks hiding carnal joys and fears. One had to beware of them, look out for them at every turn. And now there would be an infinite lot of explaining—or could it be explained? Ledoux, standing there, sheathed in her scarlet gossamer—it was not her funeral. Really, after all, she had had nothing to do with it. The damn place was under suspicion all the time.

"Got any booze with you?" the policeman was asking him, still holding to his arm. He was rather warm and friendly about it, regarded it somewhat as a joke evidently.

"No," said Milton. "It's all gone."

"Well, come on. Let's go."

They went down the hall. It was a dingy, dirty place, full of lurking, dirty smells. The dust in the carpet had not been beaten out for years. There was the clank of the elevator mechanism as the clerk pushed the button, and then they all waited in silence for the car.

Mechanically they stepped in and mechanically they descended. There was the pavement—and the black, velvety sky overhead—and the stars—Betelgeuse winking mightily away in his mighty orbit. At the curb stood a small car, with the curtains shrouding its interior. Milton's escort led him gently across the pavement toward this unpretentious equipage. The next moment he was holding open the door.

Milton looked up into his broad, red face. It was a matter-of-fact face. "Who's framed this business, Casey?"

The officer seemed puzzled. "Framed? Who in hell said it was framed? I been followin' that yellow car all the way from Bristow. What's become of them other two boys was in with you?"

"Oh, I see! I thought it was something else. Well, what's the charge, then?"

"You can ask his Honor in the mornin'."

Casey turned and looked back at the darkened portal of the Cavendish. The obscene clerk was standing there watching. The officer raised his hand. "All right, Joe. Much obliged to you."

Milton clambered into the car.

JOHN CARAWAY breakfasted alone. George waited on table with his uncertain, puttering care. The dining-room was still and there was a fresh coolness in the air, for the hour was barely seven. Caraway ate deliberately. His grapefruit he attended to, a segment at a time, squeezing out all the seeds before conveying a morsel to his mouth. George and Mrs. Snively had received their training before the big *maîtres d'hôtel* and *chefs de cuisine* had invaded Goldsboro; there were several details of service that had never been brought to their attention.

Over the dining-room mantel hung a dull portrait of Milton, a sepia print of the then best photography. It had been taken when he was five years old—a solemn-faced child with a hoop and a soft, open collar and socks that disclosed chubby knees—a pathetic little figure somehow. Caraway glanced at it furtively and then attended to the stack of wheat cakes which George had placed before him.

George left the room; Caraway pushed the plate from him; the telephone bell rang. Caraway got up stiffly and walked out into the hall, took the receiver from the hook. The recess under the stairs always had seemed too small for him.

"Yes? . . . What name did you say? . . . Oh, Riggs! . . . What? . . . Oh! Where did you say? . . . Central station? . . . Yes. Where is he now? . . . How did that happen? . . . Where were you?"

A long pause.

"When does it come up? . . . Nine? All right, Riggs. I'll be down."

He went to the door and called George.

"Tell Frank to bring the car around—right away."

A few minutes later he was walking down the walk to the gate. The birds were chirruping ecstatically in the trees; the shade lay across the paving—dew on the grass. A man leaving his domicile across the street waved a greeting, thinking perhaps it would earn a short, quick ride. But Caraway did not even see him.

He stepped into the car and with a solid and substantial whir of the gears was off down the street.

Ten minutes later he stepped out upon the pavement north and to the rear of the City Hall. It was damp and cool here, the hall a gaunt, towering structure of native brownstone, very rough and with decaying mortar. Its windows were grimy. A very stern-looking man in plain clothes came across the pavement to meet him, a man who had a way of looking at the ground as he talked to one.

"Well, Riggs?"

"I'm sorry as hell, Mr. Caraway."

They walked over to the shelter of the wall. "I guess it couldn't be helped, Riggs."

Riggs looked unhappy.

Caraway searched in his pocket and drew forth two cigars. One he gave to the man, the other he stuck in his mouth after first biting off the end. Riggs, coming suddenly to life, struck a match on the granite and held it for him.

"What have they got on him?"

Riggs's light-blue eyes stared gloomily off across the square. "Bootleg squad. Nothing to it."

"No. Ordinarily not. Docketed?"

"Yes, first thing. I fixed that. It's too damn bad. I was down here last night until eleven. If I'd only stayed an hour or so longer!"

"Well, you couldn't tell. A man can't be everywhere, Riggs. Can you drop in the office later on today?"

"Sure, Mr. Caraway. I'll do that. Are you going in now? It's the third door on the left."

Caraway mounted the tall, gaunt steps with the iron rails. Down the high-ceilinged hall he walked; the place was already filling; men and women went up and down the stairs in unending streams.

He walked through the third door on the left, which he found open. He took a seat far back in one of the shiny, straight-backed theater chairs which were reserved for visitors. He sat stolidly and stared out of the windows at the blue sky. A man and a woman came and sat down beside him; their animal body smell was strong and the man twisted his hat in his hands. Two fat men came out of an interior door carrying books and papers which they put on the tables before the high desk behind the wooden railing. There was a hum of voices from the hall, a pleasant enough everyday sound. And then the judge came from the inner office, picking his teeth with a heavy quill. He was fat and short and round and bald. He carried himself with a certain dignity that was perhaps three-fourths comfort. There was a slight lull; his Honor looked absently about the room and then they were bringing in Milton from the hall. Two policemen walked behind him, showed him meticulous care to be sure that he got through the wooden gate and up the step without mishap.

There was nothing unusual in the procedure. The judge, leaning over, spoke to one of the policemen in a low tone and was answered clumsily but quickly.

Then the judge put a question to Milton, who replied in a monosyllable. There was nothing dramatic about it at all. There was a lull. The judge looked off at the ceiling and then in a matter-of-fact tone he announced the bail.

At this juncture John Caraway got up and came forward. He laid a bundle of notes on the desk. He was as laconic as the rest. A newspaper reporter in the rear of the room had turned away, but at the sight of money on the desk he came back into the room and regarded them all curiously.

Then the judge announced a date. And Milton and John Caraway stood alone in the courtroom which the unencumbered visitors had vacated at the end of the hearing.

"I have a car outside. Better come home and have some breakfast."

WITHIN an hour and a half from the time when the car had first left the curbing, it was returning, so swiftly can the wheels of justice move with the proper lubrication. Only once, as the big machine rolled out of the traffic of Main Street, had Milton ventured into speech: "Well, I'm a damn fool into the bargain." And then as they entered the quiet confines of St. Paul Place and caught sight of the faithful if brazen matron directing the benison of the fountain upward into the limpid sunshine: "I hoped maybe you wouldn't find out about it. But I'll say you had all the wheels going in fine shape."

Caraway stood back and went behind the boy as they gained the front walk. Up the front steps they went, through the front door which was standing open—back into the dining-room. Milton tossed his hat upon the rack as he passed, and in the doorway he inspected his hands for a moment in absent-minded fashion.

They sat at the table facing each other

and George brought in the breakfast—just as if it had not been served before that morning. And Milton, absorbed with more momentous matters, found nothing unusual in that the hour was after nine.

George had left the room; the grapefruit—two portions—lay untouched. Milton looked up suddenly at John Caraway.

"I guess the only thing for me to do is to beat it. I—I don't quite trust myself to stick around in these parts under the circumstances."

"That's up to you," said John Caraway. He was watching the boy very intently from his end of the table.

"You see"—Milton threw out his hands in a gesture of supreme impatience—"the very first thing I had to do was the most dangerous thing I could think of. A chap with a flaw in his title should keep out of court. Oh, hell! I—well, these newspapers are waiting for such stuff just like carrion flies."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," said Caraway.

"Oh, it hasn't. One is just afraid, that's all."

MILTON was silent, sat staring at his plate. As yet he had touched nothing. "Would you miss the money you left there with his Nibs?"

"Not materially."

"Well, I'll just jump the thing. I can't stand the thought of going on the grill next week or whenever they set the case."

"That would be the very worst thing you could do."

"I know. But then there's some chance, and I don't want to take it. There are certain things about this business I don't care to have brought before the people of Goldsboro while I'm in it. And it would be good riddance."

It was Caraway's turn to look into his plate. "Where do you want to go?" he said after a little.

"Where? Oh, I don't know. I did have a thought of Axim. But I'd be no good there. I don't know."

"It might not be a bad idea—till things blow over—in your own mind, I mean. You could learn things there that you'd never think about in the mill." Caraway sat back, thoughtfully revolving the business in his mind, a look of relief in his face. "There's other towns besides Goldsboro, too."

Milton pushed his plate from him and stood up. "No," he said. "Maybe later on I might drift around to it, but not now. I don't know what to do except get away." He stood in indecision.

"Eat your breakfast."

"No. I don't want it. Fact is, I'm restless as the devil. I've got to get going. There's a feeling that if I stay in this town another hour something will just close in around my feet."

"No use to feel that way. Better think this thing out."

"No. I'd just better start." He started walking to the door.

Caraway got up, came round the table and stood beside him, near the door to the hall. The old man's brows were shaggy and long and sprinkled with gray, and there were deep, dark pouches beneath his eyes. He had taken out the omnipresent cigar, was biting off the end of it, speculating as to its quality.

"It's possible that I may end up in Axim—I don't know. I've got a lot to thrash out first."

By the quick gleam in John Caraway's eyes it was apparent that he had been deeply moved.

"You're not going now? Not going to take anything with you?"

"No. I think I'd rather not. And the sooner, the better."

Milton turned abruptly and walked down the hall, to the front door. Caraway followed him. They gained the steps. Caraway spat audibly, a slug from the black cigar. "Need any money?"

"No. I've some in the bank. I'll get that."

Caraway's face was twitching; there was a deep pain in his eyes, but he moved ponderously across the vestibule, descended the steps with the boy, stood uncovered in the brilliant golden sunshine.

"Governor," Milton said suddenly, "I—a—there's nothing in any precedent I've ever heard of to guide me. I've just got to work this thing out. Maybe—if you fix things here—" He paused and looked off across the tree-tops. The Brook Street car went banging past the corner.

"Fix things? What do you want fixed?" He regarded the boy questioningly.

Milton turned on him a face of uncertain, perplexed entreaty. "Oh—things here in town. You know—with the papers. Keep things down—as much as you can. You know."

"I'll do what I can."

"Yes." Thoughtfully he turned to the gate.

"Won't you shake hands?"

Milton started. "Why—" Impulsively he complied.

They held the grip for a moment. "You know, you're all I've got," said John Caraway.

"Yes. I'm thinking about that too. Just give me time, Governor. And you'll keep things quiet here—make everything easier—in case—"

Caraway bowed and Milton raised his hand.

A hundred feet or so down the street Milton turned and looked back. He was walking swiftly and the pavement was a bit uneven. He saw the heavy form of the old man move slowly up the steps and into the house, not trusting himself to look back. And then Milton hurried on with his heels clicking sharply on the pavement—and a stillness in his heart.

MILTON stopped at the bank and drew out his money. It made a respectable roll. With great good fortune he had met no one he knew or who knew him. From the bank it was only three short blocks to the Union Station, and these he covered hurriedly. A short conference with the ticket master and some of the bills in the roll changed hands. But the New York train would not leave for an hour. The thought of it filled him with impatience, at the same time tugging at his heart with some unaccountable discomfort. Now that he had taken a definite step, things were in a manner clarified.

But there was still the hour to wait, and there was the chance of meeting some one. Near the station, between it and the town, was a small open square, called Gray's Park. In it stood tall, feathery trees, trimmed snugly about their trunks to prevent interference with the view; it made them seem precise and stand-offish from the ground.

An iron fence ran around the square, and the grass within was therefore fresh and green. Diagonal paths met in the center, and along them at intervals stood some wire benches, temporary anchorage for derelicts, poets, and dreamers, and those wearied of actuality. A nurse-maid with two little children had ventured out of her precinct and was sitting on the nearest bench, lost in dreamy contemplation of tree-tops and blue sky, while her charges squatted on a marble slab and chattered gaily.

Gray's Park was an abandoned graveyard. The streets bordering it were wider than other streets, and the buildings sat back in the yards: old mansions left stranded by the ebbing of the business tide and now occupied by tailors and cleaning establishments and photograph galleries. Hence there was an air about the place that was different. Out Fourth Street, two blocks distant, stretched the dazzling sweep of Broadway, and on the corner—he could just see the cornice and the sloping roof—stood the Medical College. It was all quite drowsy and calm.

In the park the birds were twittering high up in the trees. A robin dropped to the walk and went scuttling along, pausing to cock his head at the two children perched upon the gravestone. Down Fifth Street, across the park from them, an automobile was rolling slowly. Suddenly there struck up the penetrating notes of a chime piano hidden somewhere behind its drawn curtains: "I'm Just Crazy 'Bout Harry." The syncopation was provoking. The children looked up, entranced, and then ran to their nurse, who tried to point out to them the source of the alluring sounds.

He walked in at the gate and sat down on the bench, at the opposite end from the nurse-maid. For a long time he sat there, quietly watching the children. There was a harshness in his throat. God Almighty had made a fair world; mankind had filled it with shadows. And why was it one could never tell which was of whose making? A man had to play his own game even though there was no chance of winning. He swallowed the thing and, dry-eyed, took out his watch. It said ten twenty-five. He thought a minute. And then he got up and walked over toward the east gate. The time was growing short.

He stepped through the gate out upon the broad sidewalk and ran squarely into Alma Poteet.

Her eyes were wide with a strange expression as she stood there and looked at him.

"I—a—I've been looking for you," she said. "Ever since last night. I phoned everywhere—to your office—to the Club—everywhere."

"I thought you'd gone to Spencer."

"I'm supposed to—this afternoon. . . . Father told me about it, Milton. I know."

"Fine sob-stuff, isn't it?"

SHE bit her lip, looked at the ground. Two bright red spots were in her cheeks.

"I wanted you to know I knew."

"I don't see why that was necessary."

"Yes. I think it was."

She paused and looked off up the street, and he could see the faint beginnings of tears in her eyes.

"Well, maybe you can understand what I was driving at—the other day."

"Oh!" she said. "I wish I had not said I'd go. I can't. And yet I don't see how I can get out of it."

He made no reply—merely stood there, gazing at the pavement. A sudden, restless fear took hold of him. He looked up at the City Hall clock in the tower, and as he did so it struck one—lazily, and drowsily. He would have to get rid of her some way.

"There's no need of your bothering."

"Oh, but there is! Right now at the time that you're needing me?"

"It's none of your affair."

"No? Then I'm no use in the world at all."

"Listen, Alma." He took her gently by the arm. "I've got to be on my way. I'll see you across the street."

She held back just a little. "Milton—you must know this—that nothing matters. Nothing. I can shut my eyes to it. Or I can open them wide and stare it in the face—whichever you like. We can live here together—with the eyes of the world upon us. Or I will go with you to the end of the world—whichever you say. It makes no difference to me."

He stumbled across the curbing; he did not see that it was there.

"I know, Alma. I know."

"You don't have to care what the world thinks. I'll make it all up to you. Why, I'm glad—glad—for the chance!" She was crying openly now.

Slowly they crossed the street and stood on the corner in the dazzling sunlight there by the drowsy little drug store with the ragged awning.

"I know, Alma. And it all helps—a lot."

She gave a little shuddering, gasping sigh. And then quite calmly she wiped her eyes. "You don't mind, then, if I go?" And she smiled at him crookedly.

"What? Oh, no! By all means, go—just as if nothing had happened."

"Well, all right. I will. I'll write you tonight. Just as if we were together—talking it all out. And then Tuesday—when I come back, we'll decide."

She held out her hand.

He took it, pressed it lightly, and then let it go.

She smiled at him again without replying, and then she turned and left him—there in the dazzling sunlight. It had not occurred to her to question his business there. He watched her receding form for a minute with a sense of desolation. A few yards farther on she turned and waved her hand. And a little later she was lost to view in the traffic of the street.

Slowly he turned and crossed back to the park, walked through it toward the station. Behind him, back in the town, the newsboys were calling an extra; their voices were shrill and harsh, violating the drowsy June silence. He crossed the street, came under the shadow of the dingy train-shed and he glanced at the clock on the wall. The time had come.

He handed his ticket to the gateman, who looked to see what had become of the passenger's baggage. It made him feel a curious lack for the moment: a nakedness, a sense of non-protection. The coal smoke was very acrid; it made one's eyes smart intolerably.

The gateman handed him his ticket; he glanced back once more over his shoulder at Goldsboro, sleeping in the sun. And then he passed through the gate.

JOHN CARAWAY did not tarry long in the house. He climbed the stairs to the second story and went into his room. For perhaps five minutes he remained there, and when he emerged he again descended the stairs, went to the back hall door and called George:

"When Dr. Poteet phones tell him I've gone to Mr. Brille's. Tell him I'll be back in thirty minutes. He can come on around and wait for me if he wants to."

"Yessuh."

Caraway then went out of the front door, around the side walk to the garage in the rear. It had been a large brick stable and still looked the part, with little cupolas, a weather-vane, and a tiny bird-house. Frank, the chauffeur, was filling the radiator of the big car with fresh water from a hose.

"I want to go to Sixth and Pearl, Frank."

As they passed Broadway, going north, the clock in the post-office tower struck struck nine-thirty. Things had been moving rather fast.

They swung into Pearl Street in the traffic where it was slower going. At a tap on the window Frank drew the car up nearer the curb and Caraway got out. They were directly in front of the bald white façade of the office of the Goldsboro *Ledger*, and through the big glass windows the presses could be seen grinding out their daily stint. It was a busy place.

Caraway dismissed his man. "No use to to park, Frank. Take the car home. I'll phone if I need you."

Frank touched his cap and the automobile moved on.

Caraway turned, stepped up on the curbing, made his way through the crowd that was reading the bulletin board, one sort of free service that the managers of the paper felt could be dispensed without violating any of their established tenets of modern journalism.

A long flight of steps led to the upper offices, from the banisters of which one could survey the scene of bustle and industry. The "classified want ad section" was ostensibly the largest department of its kind in the United States. The *Sunday Ledger* was thrifty, was successful; nothing was refused space in its columns which brought in revenue.

Caraway gained the upper story. He emerged into a dim sort of hall lighted by skylights, a hall of numberless doors with ground-glass upper halves. Some of these doors carried inscriptions—signs—captions; others were blank. He seemed to be entirely at home. He made his way over to one of the "unnamed" portals and pushed it open. An inside room lighted by electricity was revealed. A large, bull-necked man in livery and with a stolid, lowering face sat at a small desk table thumbing a stack of circulars. He looked up as Caraway entered and the latter nodded to him curtly.

A SOLID door with what seemed to be a genuine gold knob stood in the opposite wall. To this Caraway stepped at once. He knocked upon it. And without waiting for an answer he opened it and stepped into the inner room.

Max Brille looked up from a flat-topped desk with an expression of annoyance. But immediately it changed into the flashing smile which he shot at the visitor.

"Come in. Been thinking about you this morning." He pointed to a chair opposite his desk.

In the bright light of the sunny room he seemed somehow more foreign than ever. His hair, plastered to his skull as usual and parted smoothly in the middle, was curled back on his forehead; his little waxed mustache was crisp with energy. The flash of his white teeth, the snap in his dark eyes at once disclosed the vital force that was making the *Ledger* one of the most amazing institutions in the land of countless amazements. But incongruously too he seemed to be placed there—a jewel misset. There was something of the mountebank about him; he might have fitted without alteration into the ticket booth of an itinerant circus. In spite of his modest dark-blue serge suit, his immaculate white shirt with immaculate soft cuffs, his black bow tie and bat-wing collar, this something about him suggested *pari-mutuel* betting machines and long dim sheds and throngs of excited people. He was to all appearances, if appearances ever go for anything, a disciple of P. T. Barum in highest standing. He had the look of a sleek and genial hawk.

"Yes," he went on. "I had a letter from Billings—up Estabrook way, you know. And he says the fishing will be better than ever this spring. The new stock's coming on."

He had spoken pleasantly with that detached attention which business men employ at the advent of some one entitled to interrupt the flow of their thoughts.

Then down to business: "Well, what can I do for you?"

Caraway hitched his chair up to his desk. "What have you got in the first edition about my boy?"

Brille looked surprised. In fact, the sudden sobering of his features might not have seemed quite genuine to skeptical observers. "Why, I don't know. I hadn't heard. I don't see the general news as a rule. I leave that entirely to my subordinates."

"Find out, will you?"

Brille took down the receiver and called a number. He sat, bent over the desk, quietly waiting, with a tiny frown between his black brows, his lips slightly parted showing his even white teeth.

Beyond him on the window sill a pot of red geraniums glowed and flourished in the sun. With the slightest strain on the imagination one might have pictured lace curtains there, too.

THE number was answering. Brille's expression hardened with volatile swiftness.

"Anything there on Caraway—young Caraway? . . . It's—" He turned to his visitor.

"Police court? . . . Run in. . . . Yes, I see. Well, bring up a galley proof at once."

He hung up the receiver, settled back in his chair and wiped his mouth with a silk handkerchief. Apparently he loved his comfort. "That acreage of the Osceola Company's—you're passing up something pretty good there, aren't you?"

Caraway made no reply.

"They tell me that the structure from the Ponce de Leon field extends over the state and county boundaries pretty close to the southeast corner of the Company's holdings." As he leaned back he flashed a look at Caraway over the tip end of a desk ruler which he had been twirling.

"Why don't you develop it, then?"

Brille looked away and shrugged. "I'm not an oil man. And I'm not a farmer—nor a lumber man. The *Ledger* keeps me busy here."

At this juncture the door opened and a man in shirt-sleeves and wearing a most uncomfortable-looking pince-nez came in. Without speaking he laid a sheet of paper on the desk before Brille. Brille pushed it toward Caraway without looking at it. "That will be all, Morley," he said, nodding to the man.

Caraway picked up the paper. It was damp; the type was freshly black; some obvious errors in typesetting appeared at the margins. Slowly he read the thing. And then when he had finished, he put it back on the table again.

"What will it cost me to buy that article?"

Brille's face took on an expression of great shock. And then he seemed deeply pained. He strove to speak but had another access of acute discomfort. "Caraway, you're insulting our organization."

"We'll, let's forget that. I'll give you ten thousand dollars not to print that squib."

Brille pushed the galley proof from him as if it were something unclean. "The columns of the *Ledger* are not for sale," he said with dignity.

Caraway was silent; he viewed the editor dispassionately and levelly.

"News is public property," Brille went on. "It is unfortunate for you this matter had to come up. But it's not our fault. We have no choice in the matter. We've got to print the news as it comes."

"I'll give you twenty thousand," Caraway interrupted.

Brille's eyes grew round and bright; he smiled and his teeth were dazzling. "Now you're joking. You're having a little fun at my expense." Nevertheless, he seemed slightly nervous. And then he grew serious again. "I'm sorry, Caraway. I don't see how I can possibly help it. It—Morley saw the boy at the police court—well, I just don't see how it can be helped. You've got a mistaken idea of the duties—of the functions of a modern journal."

"Yes, maybe I have. But if that's the case, what's the idea of that last sentence there—there—at the bottom?" He pushed the paper forward, pointing to the passage with his finger.

Brille picked it up, seemingly with surprise. He read it slowly. He laid the paper down, the surprise still ruling his features. He looked at Caraway, became grave, and then looked away. "I don't know. These boys of ours—they dig up amazing things. I don't know how they do it."

"No, I suppose not. I'll give you twenty thousand dollars in cash—in fifteen minutes—to destroy that article and whatever sequel you've got planned for it. This thing here is harmless in itself. But for certain reasons I prefer it not to be published. I don't know what you've got up your sleeve for me and mine." Very quietly he rose to his feet.

BRILLE'S face grew somber. "I'm not in the habit of letting any one insult me that way, Caraway."

"I'm not insulting you. I'm merely talking business. You sell silence and I want to buy it. You and Greenwalt came to mutually satisfactory terms. There was Richardson; he was more stubborn—wasn't willing to pay the price, and it cost him his wife. It's all in knowing your market. I'll pay you twenty thousand dollars for what you've got on me. It may not be worth it—in the current journalistic standards. But I'll pay it. Right now—before this thing gets too far."

Brille sprang to his feet, his face livid. The showman was more obviously angry than amiable. "I'll not stand for that from any one."

Caraway began to gnaw his underlip. He had not moved. Directly Brille calmed down.

"Well," said Caraway quietly, "are you going to take it? Or aren't you?"

Brille looked down at the desk and was silent.

"I want this matter settled. You expect to settle it, don't you? You'll be going to press in thirty minutes or so and I want to get back to my office."

Brille made an effort to speak but failed. He sat staring at the polished top of his desk.

And then Caraway laughed. "You don't know what I mean, do you?"

He swung about suddenly. The door of the *Ledger* safe was standing slightly ajar behind him. He moved quickly. He opened the door and stepped in, despite Brille's warning shout. Almost instantaneously he reappeared holding a small cabinet drawer, a section of one of those office appurtenances seen in hundreds of offices—a small, compact steel object painted dark green and filled with small cards. He set this down on the desk before him. Brille was standing by his chair; in the doorway the stolid chauffeur stood, waiting.

"Leave that alone, Caraway." Brille's face was white with anger He had the expanded nostrils, the parted lips, the roving glance of a trapped animal—not at all the look of the most important man west of the Alleghenies.

Quickly Caraway ran his finger along the top of the cards. He stopped and pulled one out. It all took but the slightest fraction of a second. He held up the card, regarded it obliquely. "This, Brille," he said, "is probably what the reporter meant by 'sensational developments expected.' Tell your man everything is all right. I'm not going to hurt you."

No one moved. And Caraway went on steadily:

"This concludes my business here, I guess. You'll not print one word about me or mine, Brille, this morning. Or any other morning. I want to take this home and read it over at my leisure. I've an idea that there is something illegal about it—that you can be held liable—"

"Put it down, Caraway. It doesn't belong to you," Brille repeated the words monotonously.

"But if you can't, then I'll attend to that part of it myself. You won't print the name Caraway in your paper or in any other paper, will you, Brille?

"This other trash—I suppose I ought to take it with me too, for the sake of the poor devils you've got crucified there—but that's none of my business." He gave the drawer a push which sent it crashing to the floor, so that the cards spilled out in a stream.

And at that, Brille straightened convulsively back toward the window; he had been standing with his hands in the pockets of his coat. It was a simple movement and one unfraught with significance. But upon the heels of it there came a sharp, cracking noise and Caraway, who had turned toward the door, suddenly crumpled up in the middle and slid to the floor.

Brille stood watching him for a moment, a look of vague alarm on his face, and then he hurried from the room. The big chauffeur, who had not moved, stepped aside to let him pass. And then he too disappeared. John Caraway, on his back on the richly hued Brussels carpet, lay quite still.

There was some sound of disturbance beyond the door, though the sharp crack had not been a devastating sound by any means. Feet seemed to hurry along the corridor without. But no one entered and the sunlight lay on the geraniums quite cheerily—gleamed on the small white cards strewn across the floor.

Then the door opened and in came the Reverend Abner Poteet. There was anguish on his face, for all the pretty sunshine and the soft little breeze that came in through the open upper half of the window. He came forward swiftly and stooped. He laid his hand on Caraway's forehead—peered into his half-closed eyes. Then he stood up again. His face was deathly pale. For a moment he was motionless, the look on his face not unlike that on the face of the prostrate man. Something seemed to catch his eye. Looking behind him quickly, he stooped again and lifted from the floor one of Caraway's outstretched hands. With some difficulty he disengaged the fingers, took from them a crumpled card which he hurriedly shoved into his inside coat pocket. He had barely accomplished this when a hubbub sounded along the corridor and a moment later two men burst in upon them—staring, excited strangers.

Poteet turned to them and threw out a hand.

"I was too late," he said.

THE clock in the tower of St. Peter's struck nine; the storm clouds swept over it in a swirl of mist. Over the elms of Central Park was a mass of shadow, the treetops moving fitfully to and fro. An arc lamp at the corner of Belgravia swung and tossed, its swivel screaking dismally, and the pale-blue light from its carbons flickered and gleamed on the sleek back of the lonely lady of the fountain. For some reason the water had not been shut off; it swept the east pavement with a drench of cold spray. Above the roofs of the houses on the west side of the Place a pale gleam hung in the sky and as the Reverend Mr. Poteet sat watching, a capful of black smoke swept across in mad flight, swirling, twisting—and was gone.

The Reverend Mr. Poteet was watching. He sat in a stiff little camp chair with the house all dark and silent behind him, with the door of the front parlor standing just barely ajar. In the back hall a night lamp burned, carefully shaded, and a faint but pervading sweetish odor hung in the air. The house had seemed stuffy and foul, so he had left the front door open, and he now sat with his elbows on his knees watching the sky.

As the clock in St. Peter's finished its toll, a silence seemed to settle over Goldsboro, with only that sweep of cloud wrack northward. The Reverend Mr. Poteet took out his silk handkerchief and wiped his mouth. Back in the hall there was a fretful gnawing, a mouse worrying the dry casement. It worked nervously, with little bursts of desperate speed and then pauses of heavy silence. The wind at its business high overhead suddenly swooped with a clattering burst; a little eddy of trash went whispering down the side passage, dry and protesting—and then was still. Poteet leaned forward in his chair so that his view commanded the approach. The treetops in the park were moving dimly against the sky and once there came a slight patter of rain. St. Paul Place was deserted by all save a single belated pedestrian down at the north end, where his footsteps sounded hollow and lonely between the walls.

The belated pedestrian was approaching. At this moment it occurred to Poteet that it was a woman; the steps were hurried and mincing—short, hurried strides. He wondered vaguely that she should be abroad. He wondered but vaguely because the day with its cruel demands had now robbed his mind of decision. And when the hurried, shadowy figure paused before the gate, then opened it and came up the walk toward him, he evinced no surprise. Stiffly he rose and stood with one hand on the back of his chair.

The woman was peering up at him; she still seemed to be uncertain. But instead of inquiring, she came forward again, mounted the steps, stood facing him in the vestibule. He could see that she was a large woman, a woman past her youth, a smartly dressed woman. The slant of her small hat bespoke all that, even in the harried gloom of the vestibule. And there was a rather violent scent about her, of musk and roses. The minister stood respectfully to one side.

She fumbled in her handbag a moment, then passed into the hall, where she gave a quick look about her.

"I'm afraid I forgot to bring a card," she said in a throaty, low voice. "I—a—have the arrangements all been made?"

"Thursday," said the Reverend Mr. Poteet.

The woman still continued to look around; her glance traveled to the parlor door which stood ajar; it rested there As she raised her handkerchief to her mouth he could see that her hand trembled. The light was very dim—so dim that the contours of her features were not discernible. But her hand had trembled.

Poteet was silent.

"I'm Mrs. Bates," she said at length. "I'm a friend of the family." And then, as Poteet made no reply: "I—a—I happened to be in Markham today. Markham—that's forty miles from here—"

"Yes. I know."

"I just happened to see it in the paper. I—a—I—"

"Won't you come back into the library?" said the Reverend Mr. Poteet.

She followed him silently, took a seat in the big leather chair at his indication. When she again looked into his face—he stood with his back to the light—he could see that her eyes were wet. She was profoundly agitated. When she spoke her lips trembled. Then she took out her handkerchief, pressed it to her lips, and was calm again. "There was nothing I could do," she said; "but I had to come. I couldn't do a thing all day."

"You were visiting in Markham?"

"No. I'm a business woman. I represent a ladies' ready-to-wear house. It was a funny thing. After all these years I had decided to come over to Goldsboro to see him—to see Mr. Caraway. I had fully determined to come tomorrow." She paused and looked distractedly at the dim old oil painting above the mantel.

Poteet sat watching her intently.

She sighed and then she began to twist her fingers one at a time. He could see the rise and fall of her opulent bust. A smooth beauty in her face had only begun to fade; there was an almost imperceptible fold below her chin. Her hands, fine and white, were heavily jeweled.

Suddenly she got up. She looked about the room and then at the Reverend Mr. Poteet with quick decision.

"MR. CARAWAY meant a great deal to me—years ago," she said.

"Yes. I know."

"You know?" She paused with one hand on the table.

"Yes—as soon as you came in. I wasn't sure just why you had come."

"Weren't sure why I had come! You know?"

"Yes," said Poteet. "I used to live in Illyria. And I wasn't sure what had brought you here—at this time."

The woman stared at him fixedly. By degrees the light died in her eyes, leaving a dull apathy. The years piled on their burden.

"John Caraway was my friend," explained Poteet. "I would do anything in my power to prevent—"

"Oh, there's nothing like that!" she exclaimed. "How in Heaven's name could you think that? Oh, I'm not that kind!" Agitation spoke from her every feature. "Whatever else I've been—oh, please don't think that!"

"Won't you sit down?" he said, somewhat mollified.

She resumed her seat. "There are some things I'd like to know—like to ask you. Why—what was the cause of it? The paper I saw was so confused—"

Poteet was staring at the floor, deeply thoughtful. When he looked up, he peered at her intently. "It's all part of the same pattern," he said. "That's why I thought perhaps you had come. Well, no matter. But it is all this same dreary old business, brought to life again."

The woman stared at him blankly.

"There's a newspaper publisher here—perhaps you've heard of him—who has made a fortune blackmailing men with histories like John Caraway. Here today, after twenty years of silence, it all threatened to come out again." He paused.

The woman sat gazing at him level-eyed, her lips slightly parted.

Poteet reached in his pocket. "I can show this to you, I guess. You're—there's nothing new in it and you could have made known your story years ago if you had only cared to."

She reached out her hand for the paper which he held.

"This," said Poteet, "was what he—he gave his life for. You can see for yourself."

He handed her the small white card, still badly crumpled.

In the light of the table lamp she read. She read slowly, and when she had finished she let her hands fall into her lap and stared off at the floor.

"But they've got it all wrong," she said at last in an agitated voice.

Poteet made no reply.

"This woman Carlyle—who is she? What did he have to do with her?"

"That's one of the difficulties," said Poteet. "This man Brille—he has collected his information at great cost. He has followed down the flimsiest scraps of evidence. Years ago there was a bit of scandal in Illyria about Mr. Caraway and this young woman. She lost her position through an indiscretion with him. It was in the papers then. And Brille's agent, coming some years later, of course found it."

"Oh!"

"This card I found in his hand. He had doubtless taken it from the cabinet against Brille's wishes, and that is when Brille—"

He said no more. In his hand he held a few small articles: a pocket-knife, a bunch of keys, a small file. He viewed them in the light of the lamp, slowly turning them over.

"And those—" She reached over and gently touched them. "What's this?"

"It's what we used to call a buckeye."

She turned it over in her hand several times and then returned it. "Men have funny little loyalties, don't they? He's carried that thing for years, hasn't he? It's worn as smooth as glass."

THE Reverend Mr. Poteet returned the objects to his pocket. "We've got to protect those things he would protect," he said, "now that he can no longer do it himself."

"But what I don't understand"—her face darkened—"is how they happened to pin that story on the poor girl. What's become of her?"

"Oh, she died fifteen years ago. She took a notion she wanted to be a missionary and she went to Syria. She died there of some malignant eastern fever—all alone. At least, there were no white people with her. This other—well, you know how rumors can hang on. In spite of all the care we took with the boy, the story somehow persisted that there was something fishy about it all."

Mrs. Bates nodded gently.

"Your husband," went on Poteet, "is he—"

"You mean Henry?"

"He's about the same. I go to see him once a year—in the fall usually."

At Poteet's look of puzzlement she explained: "Henry's in a sanitarium. When he came back from Mexico—he was down there two years—he had developed tuberculosis. I had to put him in a sanitarium. He's been there ever since. He stays about the same. But you spoke of 'the boy.' I don't understand. Did John ever marry?—I thought I had kept pretty good track of him but I'd never heard that he'd—"

"No," said Poteet. "It's the child—the original one—your child." He found it difficult to manage the exact words.

She regarded him in amazement. For an appreciable instant she sat with mouth open, and then she laughed. She rose to her feet and continued to laugh. She held her handkerchief to her mouth and her eyes rolled wildly. The Reverend Mr. Poteet sprang to his feet and firmly took hold of her arms.

"Sit down," he commanded. "You must control yourself."

She took the handkerchief from her mouth. She looked at him with restless eyes that roamed to and fro. Her breath caught in her throat and a tremor attacked her body. When at length she got control of herself, there was a frightened look in her eyes, a look of awestricken wonder. She narrowly skirted hysteria.

"My God, don't tell me that!" she gasped. "Listen!" She seized his sleeve and held it fast. "That was all a cooked-up scheme. We did it at the time to—to spare another woman."

"What do you mean? I don't know what you're talking about."

"No. Of course you don't. It was a simple matter. My baby—died. They don't take much notice of such things in a home like that. You knew the Home of the Innocents in Illyria, didn't you? They didn't bother much about previous histories or who you were, there.

"WELL," she went on, two bright spots of red in her cheeks, "there was another girl—in the next room. A beautiful, high-spirited thing she was, with thick curly brown hair and a broken heart. She was somebody from Cincinnati, they said—didn't know what her real name was. It was a case of desertion—a complicated business. Nobody bothered. Everybody was too busy, and you know the kind of help they had there."

The Reverend Mr. Poteet sat staring at the visitor, his face fixed and white. She paused a moment, moistened her lips, and then went on:

"The day her baby came she died. And I—well, you don't know about such things. Well, I was holding on to life by one thread. You know. I hated the thought of having a child, and after it came—well, once you're a mother, things are different. The poor little thing's baby was awfully puny. And I was starved myself. So I took the little thing to nurse—for a few days. I guess nobody cared much—nobody paid any attention. At any rate, they got to calling it my baby. It was easier. It was that way for a whole week I guess. And they were always changing help there—the maids wouldn't stay. Can't blame 'em much. When I left I didn't pay much attention. I was worried—" She looked at the watch on her wrist and stood up. "I must go," she said. "I'll miss the night train back to Markham."

The Reverend Mr. Poteet stood up automatically; his face looked haggard and worn and aged with emotion. He groped for the back of his chair. "You're sure—you're sure—you're not— Why, there, wasn't any need of his— Why, the thing is preposterous!"

Mrs. Bates was distinctly nervous. And she was, besides, a bit impatient. It was evident that she longed to be off. "I could have told him all the time—only he seemed so anxious to be rid of me."

Poteet followed her out into the hall. As they approached the front door, the sky was seen, a patch of deep blue and some stars. But even as they watched, clouds came hurrying and obscured them once more.

They stood again in the vestibule. The woman was breathing with considerable agitation. As they passed the parlor door, she had paused and looked at it, reached out one hand, and then shrunk away.

Poteet took her by the elbow. "You're right sure you're telling me the exact truth?"

"It's God's own word. Oh, but think of it!"

Again the wind, passing, stirred up the dust and twigs and leaves from the previous summer—went whispering down the side passage.

"Where—where is the boy now?"

"He's away—not here at present."

"Oh! And isn't there anything I can do?"

"No," said Poteet. "God's ways are strange ways—sometimes."

"I don't think God has had anything to do with it," she said brokenly. "I—a—I'll drop you a line. If you say so, I'll come back here as soon as I'm through in Markham."

"I think," said Poteet, "you'd better stay away."

"Yes. Perhaps I had. Well, good night, doctor."

"Good night."

He stood and watched her hurrying figure until it reached the corner, where it turned east and immediately disappeared behind the wall of the last house in St. Paul Place. Then he walked slowly back into the hall, back to the recess beneath the stairs. A moment later his voice could be heard at the telephone.

HE HAD barely hung up the receiver when he heard a step in the hall. Rising, he peered around the edge of the stairs. A man was entering the front door, his silhouette outlined against the gray western sky. The Reverend Mr. Poteet walked forward. The light from the hall lamp lay upon the carpet, and at that moment the man stepped resolutely into its circle. He saw then that it was Milton Caraway.

"Well, doctor," said the latter, "I can relieve you now."

Poteet was speechless.

Milton turned and walked back down the hall to the parlor door. He took hold of the knob, pushed the door partly open, paused and turned again to Poteet, who had followed him silently.

"Is he in here?"

"Yes," said Poteet.

Milton let go the knob. He stood for a moment in the center of the hallway, with his head bent, his hand softly stroking his chin.

"I wasn't gone long," he said, half to himself. "It didn't take long to find out what I was after. You don't suppose people know I ran away?"

"I don't think so," said Poteet.

"I HAPPENED to buy a paper in Millersburg—I was waiting there for my train for the East. That was at four o'clock. It was all there. So I came back. I killed him, doctor, didn't I? Sure as gun is iron."

"No, Milton. God's ways are strange sometimes."

"The hell I didn't! And then I ran away. Ran away from the only friend I've ever had. That's guts! You know, I realize now his gentleness to me—through all these years—just realizing it now. And I've come back now to see that he gets a a fair deal. That and look after the things he would want looked after."

"Yes, Milton."

"You know"—he raised his head and looked musingly out into the night—"there's a lot of us think that this life is to be led just for our own benefit—that things ought to come out just thus and so, or else we won't play. I was that kind of a slacker. Now he"—he jerked his head over toward the door—"why, life was just something to be endured—for him. But do you think he cried about it? Or lay down on the job?"

"I don't think it was that way with him, Milton."

"Oh, but it was! And I want to tell you that, in the past four hours, while I was coming back—back to Goldsboro—I found out—I may not be entitled to what he's left by law. But he's my own—he's my friend. And I'm going to stand by and see he gets some of his deserts. I'm going to stand by this thing no matter what they put in the paper. I'm going to stick and manage the affairs of the house of Caraway—where I belong. My God, doctor, I loved that man!"

Poteet bowed his head. And then Milton turned abruptly and threw open the door. A burst of sickly sweet perfume came drifting forth. And into the heavy-laden darkness Milton walked.

For a long time Poteet went slowly up and down the hall. Once George came to the back hall door, peered through, and disappeared again. The mouse in the casement renewed his gnawing. The clock on the mantel in the back parlor struck the hour.

In the front room Milton stood by the meager convention that man has devised for a final housing, a tumult in his heart. The years rolled back and laid their secrets bare. So many things were clear now—things that had lurked in a muggy darkness of indecision. The pattern of life had but one design. Like a gold thread of purpose it pushed forward from beginning to end; all the rest was mere ornamentation. Loyalty! Without it the fabric fell to pieces. Loyalty! To one's own. To oneself. That was all one was master of—irrevocably master of. He had come back to his own. God willing, he would never desert them again. What might still happen to him did not matter. One worried altogether too much about oneself.

A step in the hall caused him to look up. Some one walked past the parlor door. It did not matter.

All that he had—all that his heart craved—in its affection—lay silent there before him. The world was a hostile place, a force that sought by devious means to crush you—to take your place, your advantage, your very heart's loves and divert them to its own use. Well, let it try, if it dared. Here was one who had never given in—

A light touch on his arm. He looked around. Alma Poteet stood by his side, her face dim and white looked up into his. It was strange that she should be there.

And then with a little cry he sank upon his knees. He pressed his head against a cold, smooth surface there in the dark and wept.

THE END

THE PARROT

It Led a Timid Girl to Break Unbreakable Rules and at Last to Wonder What Good the Rules Were, Anyway

By Elizabeth Bowen

WHEN Mrs. Willesden's parrot escaped it rocketed in a pale green streak across the sky and settled in the chestnut tree at the foot of the garden, where it became invisible among the branches. Invisible, that is to say, to Maude Pemberty and Eleanor Fitch, who stood staring up under their hands into the glare of the morning; until Maud located its head, a vermilion blot borne up and down like a buoy, slowly, by the undulations of a lower layer of the foliage. The chestnut tree blazed all over in the sunshine with candles of wax blossom. The scent of the pollen gave Eleanor Fitch shivers; about the end of May she would pass the tree on any pretext, sighing for something that she could not remember. Maud was in love and chestnut flowers meant nothing to her; besides, as parlormaid, she had more to do in the house than Miss Fitch, who was only a companion.

Now they both stood looking up at the parrot piteously, fearfully: Maud, who had left the window open, and Eleanor, who had been cleaning the cage. They advanced toward the tree unconsciously, step by lingering step, as though attracted; still with that mesmeric upward stare.

The parrot took no notice of them. It wabbled along the branch, peevishly disentangling its wing and tail feathers from the long-fingered leaves. Its tongue was in one corner of its beak; its head turned and its eyes rolled from side to side in a mixture of ecstasy and apprehension. Once or twice it lost its balance, and tilted right forward with a muffled squawk until it was hanging nearly upside down. It would recover itself, look reproachfully down at its claws, and totter along farther, till another clump of leaves swept down to assault it. It wore an air of silly bravado, and looked what it was—thoroughly idiotic.

Mrs. Willesden had no brothers, cousins or lovers; none, certainly, who were sailors; and none of these, therefore, had brought the parrot home to her from Indian seas. Dark-faced men may have dazzled it against the purple of an ocean, with the swinging gold of their earrings, and held it up to stroke the sleek vermilion of its head. This Eleanor would have wished to believe, and Mrs. Willesden even playfully asseverated; but the parrot had not, somehow, the aroma. It had no pedigree; Mrs. Willesden had bought it at an auction at the other side of London; a very new-looking parrot, newer-looking even than the complete edition of Lord Lytton or the mahogany chest of drawers.

It was a guaranteed talker, but its conversation was neither entertaining, relevant, nor profane. It would mutter "Pol—Po-ol—Pol-pol-pol" for hours in an ecstasy of introspection, or say, "Lead, Kindly Light"—just that, no more of the hymn. If one spoke to it, besought it, cursed it, wooed it, it would blink at one in a smolder of malevolence and say "Minnie? *Minnie!* Tom? Minnie!"

Mrs. Willesden loved the parrot and would sit beside it for hours in the afternoon. It was carried into the dining-room to meals, and its cage was placed beside her at the head of the table on a butler's tray. Eleanor hated the parrot, and used to come down and clean its cage early in the morning before breakfast, so as to get that over.

Thus it was that the parrot had escaped at a quarter past eight, before Mrs. Willesden was awake, while yellow cotton blinds still unflickeringly sheathed her windows. Mrs. Willesden slept late today; one did not care, one did not dare to wake her. Eleanor and Maud stood sodden-footed out in the dew, with now and then a backward glance up at Mrs. Willesden's window, and their hands burnt and their fingers twitched with the desire to grab the parrot by its scaly legs and its wings and thrust it shrieking back into its cage.

ELEANOR'S mind went whirling round like a wheel on the hub of this moment. She knew that what had brought her here to be Mrs. Willesden's companion had also brought about the escape of the parrot—her own immense ineffectuality. She knew that she was a clever girl, or she might possibly have loved Mrs. Willesden, she knew that she was a wise girl or she could not so continuously have tolerated her. She knew that she must be a nice-looking girl, or Mrs. Willesden, whose sense of beauty had found its culminating expression in the parrot, would never have engaged her. She knew, however, that she could not be dangerously attractive, because although she was quite ready to marry anybody who seemed at all suitable, and thus to escape from life with Mrs. Willesden and the equally odious alternative of using her brains, nobody even of the most unsuitable had so far presented himself. She never thought about men, because she fully agreed with Mrs. Willesden that this was not nice; she merely wondered sometimes when Mrs. Willesden would have become a thing of the past.

It was while thus wondering that she had turned away from the parrot's cage to look in a mirror; thus looking, she had heard the unlatched door swing open and the silken sound of the flight. As things were now, Mrs. Willesden *might* very soon become a thing of the past; a swift nostalgia for security made the sky blur and glitter and the chestnut-candles swim.

"Well, it's no good crying, miss," said Maud. "It doesn't get us out of anything, what I mean."

"I'm *not*," said Eleanor quickly. "Poll, pretty Polly-poll, come downsey."

"Come downsey!" echoed Maud. "Yah, get out of that, you dirty beast! . . . Well, he doesn't understand, miss. He's just stupid."

"Go into the house and get the cage, Maud. Stick a banana between the bars so's he can only get at it from the inside, and put it down on the grass with the door open. Go quickly and—hush."

Maud went, and Eleanor stood staring, mesmerically, up at the parrot, while the imagined eyes of Mrs. Willesden burned into her back. She stared up at the parrot, but Polly was preoccupied with his feat of balance and was perpetually in profile. He was not to be mesmerized, and just as Maud emerged from the house with the cage held at arm's length and the door invitingly open, he toppled forward urgently, beat for a moment with his wings, then flopped into the air. He did not rise very high this time, but after describing one or two lopsided circles, as though with wings unevenly weighted, he skimmed the top of the garden wall, glittered for a second above it in poised uncertainty, and vanished.

"There!" gasped Maud, and Eleanor gathered her skirts together, gave a calculating glance, and was up on the top of the wall like a cat.

THE parrot ambled slowly through the air, with, as it were, the jog of a fat pony translated into flight. It clumsily attempted a landing on some branches in the next garden and slid off again, its claws ripping the leaves. All along, in the pleasant irregular gardens of the road, glass-houses sparkled, flashing out rays; geraniums in the beds made neat little cubes of coral and scarlet; violas grew in great mauve cushions. A furtive young wind spilt the petals from the fruit trees onto the grass, stirred the pools they made, then crept away frightened. Eleanor, equally furtive, knelt on the wall, looked all round her, and tucked her skirts down.

She calculated that the parrot must without fail come wheezily to earth at either the Cuthbertsons' or the Philpots'. It would have a long way to fly before it reached the poplars of the one garden which she could not possibly enter to retrieve it. The poplars tapered above all the trees of the gardens with a sort of elegant irresponsibility; they swayed toward one another and glittered with mirth.

They rose from out of the four walls of the Lennicotts' garden, and within those walls no one in the road had set foot since the occupation of the Lennicotts.

Toward the poplars the parrot leisurely proceeded, as one in good time for an appointment, and somewhere down among them came to the earth.

Mrs. Willesden had told Eleanor that it was better not to ask about the Lennicotts, and that it was all very sad. Indeed, the less one knew the better, everybody felt, and ladies flinched as they told one another in low voices things about the Lennicotts which one did not care to say, but which demanded to be said. Mrs. Willesden told Eleanor that sin was becoming, alas, very prevalent (though one did not care to talk to an unmarried girl about these things), and that she was thankful that her mother had not lived to see these days, and that her dear husband had also been spared.

"It is not even known," she said, "that they *are* the Lennicotts; but he is a Lennicott, and she is *called* 'Mrs.' My library does not keep his novels, and that nice young man there looked very much surprised when I asked for them. Mrs. Cuthbertson lent me a copy of one of them, but I found it very difficult to read, and so did she."

"Was it improper?" asked Eleanor in a low voice, winding wool quickly.

"One may be sure of that," Mrs. Willesden had replied, "but as I tell you, I did not finish the book; it was so very dull. As far as I got, I did not see anything in it, and I glanced through to the end and did not see anything either. However, I should not have dreamed of keeping a book like that in the house with a young girl like you about. . . . Eleanor, you had better rewind that wool, you are winding it too tightly."

Even in London, it was said, many people would not know the Lennicotts; so they had come here, doubtless in the hope of making nice friends. The road deplored the Lennicotts and the neighborhood envied the road. In the evenings, long shafts of blistering whiteness streamed out from the headlamps of cars and lent an unseemly publicity to the comings and goings of everybody's cats. These cars drew up perpetually outside the Lennicotts' with a long faint sound like a sniff. Though they entertained, the Lennicotts were not rowdy; one heard only, sometimes, low excited laughter of the kind that made one wish to stop and listen; and, very rarely, Mrs. Lennicott's voice, which was very beautiful, came floating down among the trees as she sang to her guests after dinner.

The parrot dropped down among the poplars, and Eleanor's heart dropped with it, like a stone. She heard a slight rattle at the upstairs window, and knew that Mrs. Willesden's blind was up and that shortly everything would be over. She gathered herself together, her tongue curled back in her mouth with terror; and she leaped from the top of the wall into the lane full of nettles that ran along the backs of the gardens, past the Willesdens', past No. 17's, 18's, and 19's till it broadened out under the Lennicotts' poplars into a small patch of common. As she turned the bend of the lane and heard the rustle of the poplars above her, she heard also, very distinctly and monotonously, the parrot saying "Minnie? *Minnie!*" down in the garden inside the walls. Had it encountered anybody, or was it merely talking to itself?

ELEANOR did not believe that early rising could possibly be compatible with moral obliquity. An outraged sense of fitness was therefore added to her astonishment when, having adjusted her pince-nez, she found herself looking down from the top of the Lennicotts' wall on the unswerving center-parting of Mrs. Lennicott's marmalade-colored hair. The parrot sat biting its nails on one end of a pergola, and Mrs. Lennicott did not notice it because she was reading a book of poetry with large print and smoking a cigarette in a long holder. She sat in a deck chair with her feet on a recumbent watering can, and she wore, as might have been expected, colored leather shoes. When she heard the scratching sound of Eleanor's toes seeking purchase on the outer bricks she looked up, smiled vaguely, with the sun on her gold lashes, and said: "Good morning. Have you come to look for a tennis ball? Do come in."

She had a long chin, and a plump, oval, delicately colored face. Her eyebrows arched very innocently, and she looked at Eleanor uncomprehendingly but with an air of earnest effort, as though she were a verse of Georgian poetry that one could not possibly understand. "Do come in!" she repeated.

"Thank you," said Eleanor. "I only wanted that parrot." She pointed to the pergola, and Mrs. Lennicott, laying her book face downward on the grass, turned her head with interest in the same direction. Her hair was braided against her cheek.

"Really," she said, "is that your parrot? It is very beautiful. But do come in and take it away if you want it. I expect it is very valuable. It may have been here for some time but I did not notice it because this garden is always full of birds, and I am very stupid about natural history."

For the first time that morning, the parrot looked straight at Eleanor; for the first time in their acquaintanceship it had a gleam of intelligence in its eye. "Take me," it seemed to say. "I am an old sick bird, beaten out and weary. I have aspired and failed—it is finished. Take me." A white sheath rolled up over its eyes; its feathers drooped.

Eleanor had an idea that if she did not breathe very deeply, if she walked lightly on the tips of her toes, taking as few steps as possible, and if she did not look quite straight at anything, especially at Mrs. Lennicott, she might, having entered the Lennicotts' garden, yet leave it uncontaminated. She therefore sprang from the wall, alighting on her hands and on the balls of her feet, as she had been taught at school, at the very brink of a flower-bed. As she stood upright she half saw, then turned irresistibly to watch, Mrs. Lennicott rise with one ripple from the deck chair and walk as though entranced toward the pergola, holding up her hands. Her dress hung ungirt from her bosom and swept the grass, so that its hem was dark with dew.

"Oh, how beautiful you are!" she sighed. "How your head *flashes!* You must forgive me," she said to Eleanor, "but I have never looked very closely at a parrot before."

Polly was obviously gratified. He ducked his head and fluttered his tail-feathers and swayed a little from the claws. He conveyed by a multiplicity of innuendoes that Mrs. Willesden and Eleanor were a pair of frumps, and that even Minnie had left much to be desired; and that he knew a woman of distinction when he met her. Had Mrs. Lennicott been allowed to engage him further in conversation, his capture from the rear might easily have been effected; but Eleanor was too precipitate. Her outstretched hands cast a shadow; Polly felt them coming and soared into the air with spread wings like a phœnix. He squawked derision at Eleanor and steered a zigzag course to the veranda drain-pipe, from the pipe to an upper window-sill, from the window-sill to a tank, from the tank to the ridge of the roof between two chimney-pots.

"OH, HOW *terrible* for you!" cried Mrs. Lennicott, in real distress.

Eleanor's cheeks burnt; little wisps of hair came down and frisked in the light wind, tickling the back of her neck. The tides of her spirit were slow, drawn by the slow moon of her intelligence, but now anger stirred in her; she drew a gasp which shook her and locked her fingers firmly together.

"I'm going to catch that parrot," she said, turning to Mrs. Lennicott. "I'm going to catch it so's to wring its neck."

"*Have* you ever wrung anything's neck?" asked Mrs. Lennicott in an awed voice.

When Eleanor admitted that she hadn't, Mrs. Lennicott, with obvious relief, invited her to come into the house and catch the parrot.

"It would be very easy," she said, "to get out onto the roof from the window of my husband's room. He has often talked of doing so when there was too much noise in the house, but the roof is not flat enough to hold a writing-table. I don't think he is awake but if he were he would be delighted to help you."

The shadow of the house fell cold on Eleanor as she left the wind and glitter and innocence of the morning behind and walked with Mrs. Lennicott toward the steps of the veranda. Afterward, there was so much lilac in the drawing-room and the place was so heavy with it that her other impressions were blurred, except that the room with its low and very many sofas lurked on sufferance round the great jutting triangle of the piano. She was still drawing shallow breaths and walking delicately, and had the sense of passing down a long low shining tunnel of wickedness to where at the end she saw the parrot, a speck faintly visible against a familiar sky. Because it was on the west side of the house, the room was in pale shadow, but beyond, a great gold slab of sunshine lay across the pavement of the hall. Not thus fell the sunshine through the glass panels of a similar door on to Miss Willesden's oilcloth.

"You are one of the thin family, aren't you?" said Mrs. Lennicott. "There are girls on bicycles—so nice-looking—with rather a sharp-looking little dog that runs behind—though I am sure he is a dear little dog, and so faithful! No, the stairs are straight ahead, through that archway. Shall I go first?"

Eleanor said no, that she was not a Philpot.

"There are a great many people in this road, aren't there? I never knew there were so many people who didn't live in London. Of course, one sees the houses, but it is difficult to realize, isn't it, that they have insides and that they really mean anything?"

Mrs. Lennicott preceded Eleanor with a displaced shimmer of the skirts, a fragrant swish. She was not the sort of woman who rustles. The stair carpet crunched under one's feet with a velvety resistance; it had, at the first contact, a sinister sleekness. There were prints on the staircase from which Eleanor turned away quickly, tingling. It was as though the earliest darts assailed her armor. She was here in those Lennicotts' very house; its shadows and scents were surcharged for her, every contact was intolerably significant.

Then a door opened above and Mr. Lennicott came out from his bedroom onto the landing.

Eleanor stopped dead and pressed back against the wall; her shoulder caught one of the picture-frames and made it swing wildly. She shut her eyes, and at the end of that shining and inexorable tunnel the parrot quivered and receded. She was menaced, the tunnel was narrowing down upon her; she wanted to go back.

"Who in God's *name!*" cried Mr. Lennicott.

"It's a lady come to take away a parrot, darling."

"Parrot?" said Mr. Lennicott despairingly. "When did we get a parrot? Why didn't you pay for it? Where's all that money I gave you? I told you this would happen again. You know they came and took away the sundial. Not that I care whether you have a sundial or parrots or an apiary, but the people who come to take them away again are full of moral indignation, and you know—"

"It's her parrot," said Mrs. Lennicott, "and it's on the roof. Do come up," she added, turning back to Eleanor. "And let me introduce my husband, Miss—Oh, I *am* so stupid!"

"Fitch," whispered Eleanor, and, feeling her tongue curl back in her mouth again, looked up slowly.

FIRST she saw Mr. Lennicott's ankles, very thin with big bones and covered with black hairs. Then came yards, it seemed, of his dressing-gowned figure, a long thin strip bent slightly and bulging where his hands went into his pockets; then his long chin with a blue bloom on it, then his quizzical Spanish face.

"If there's anything I can do—" said Mr. Lennicott, and his teeth glimmered.

"*Is* there anything he can do?" asked Mrs. Lennicott, sweeping round and leaning toward Eleanor as she came up step by step with such eager bright expansiveness that she almost embraced her. Her eyes were of that clear blueness which almost is not when they are empty of expression; they took color like water. She was eager and impersonal.

The sun streamed in through the staircase window and Mr. Lennicott's dragons glowed; he might have stepped out of a cathedral window, and had, indeed, even that air of ornate asceticism.

"You could get out along my gutter," he said, grasping the situation quickly; "my room has an attic window—and from there to the ridge of the roof it's just a hoist." He wrapped his dressing-gown farther round him with a big gesture, reknotted the cord at his waist with an air of resolution, and, shuffling a little in his Turkish slippers, went back across the landing and held his bedroom door open for Eleanor.

"I expect the parrot isn't there any more," said she. "I—I expect it's gone. . . . I won't mind about it today, thank you very much."

"But it's such a *pity* to lose such a beautiful parrot!" wailed Mrs. Lennicott.

"I think *really* I won't—"

"Oh, come on!" said Mr. Lennicott's deep voice, suddenly. "A girl like you ought to be able to climb like a cat. No, look here. Upon my word, you don't though! I'll go up and collar the thing and you lean out of the window and grab it."

"You ought to put it *into* something," said Mrs. Lennicott. "Just wait. I'll get a bandbox." She brought a bandbox which was striped with many colors and had a French name scrawled across the top. It was so big that Eleanor had to open her arms wide to embrace it; and she tucked the lid, for better balance, under her chin. The wind was blowing in through Mr. Lennicott's open window; his curtains rushed to meet them as Eleanor contracted into an aching knot of terror, followed the be-dragoned back, leaving behind her Mrs. Lennicott, the landing, and, save death, the only way of retreat. The room smelled of cigarettes and masculine unguents, and had sloping ceilings. She remembered all those terrible books and pressed the bandbox closer to her chest, feeling morally as well as physically buttressed by it.

Mr. Lennicott, breathing through his teeth, grasped the window and flung one leg over it to the outside gutter. Eleanor wondered if she would have to appear at the inquest, and whether by that she could be compromised; and she watched Mr. Lennicott anxiously as, doubled like a brave on the war-path, he picked his way along the gutter, till he had passed the window and was out of sight.

Mrs. Lennicott came in and sat on the bed, which made Eleanor feel better. She lit a cigarette and said that Trotzky never killed himself, and that it was a lovely day and that Trotzky never took enough exercise, and that Eleanor mustn't worry. They heard a hoist and a scrabble and knew that Mr. Lennicott must now be up on the roof.

"If you would hold the bandbox," said Eleanor, "I think I'll go too, as it's my parrot." She didn't want the Lennicotts to think she was afraid of *that*.

"Do!" said Mrs. Lennicott, and, with her cigarette-holder cocked skyward from one corner of her mouth, relieved Eleanor of the bandbox. Eleanor, leaning in toward the roof, followed Mr. Lennicott along the gutter.

"Hallo-o!" hailed Mr. Lennicott from above. "That's sound. Come on, up here. Where's Piggy? Piggy coming too? It's—it's simply immense up here; you'd never believe. Come on—*hoist!*"

He gripped both her hands and hoisted. He was sitting astride of the roof, and Eleanor sat sidesaddle, tucking down her skirts round her legs. White clouds had come up and bowled past before the wind like puff-balls; the poplars swayed confidentially toward one another, then swayed apart in mirth. One of the Philpot girls was mending a bicycle down in their garden, but she did not look up. Her bowed back looked narrow and virginal. Eleanor half laughed elatedly and smoothed her hair behind her ears.

"And the parrot?" she said, quickly recalling herself and looking from left to right.

THE wind ruffled Mr. Lennicott's hair, but he sat immobile, following the clouds with his eyes and smiling to himself. "Parrot!" he echoed, starting violently. "What parrot? Where? . . . Oh, by Jove, yes! Where is it?"

"Here," whispered Eleanor, for the parrot had come sidling down the roof toward them and now sat beside her. Its feathers were disheveled, its eyes furtive, its head, dimmed seemingly in color, drooped a little. It looked sadder, smaller, less of a buffoon. It pecked wearily and perfunctorily at Eleanor's fingers as they closed upon it but said nothing as she tucked it snugly under her arm.

"Poor beast!" said Mr. Lennicott. "I believe, you know, that the other birds have been nasty to it. They don't like anything a different color to themselves: no one ever does, you know. It's damned funny."

He mused upon this, while Eleanor thoughtfully regarded him.

"Did you find the parrot, Trotzky?" inquired Mrs. Lennicott, putting her head out of the window beneath them.

"No— I mean yes!" shouted back her husband. "We've got the parrot here, not in at all good order but giving no trouble at all. Where's the basket?"

Mrs. Lennicott leaned out perilously far, encircling the bandbox with her long smooth arms. The lid was tilted a little sidewise; she placed one finger upon it to keep it thus and gurgled with pleasurable excitement as Mr. Lennicott came sliding down the roof with the parrot under his arm and crammed the bird into the box among the tissue paper.

"Clap down the lid!" shrieked Eleanor, scarlet with excitement.

Mrs. Lennicott, having obeyed her, withdrew slowly into the darkness of the room, pressing the bandbox closer to her bosom and gazing at it awed, as it began to throb with the protests of the parrot.

So that was over, and Eleanor would take the parrot home and snap the door of its cage on it, and all that hour of the day would be gone, a nothing, an irrelevancy; a lost hour that had slipped through a crack in her life and vanished. She came down from the roof nothing but an empty stomach, with an empty head above it through which desires vaguely hurried like the clouds. She sighed, as she so often sighed beneath the chestnut tree, and did not want to leave the sunny landing where Mr. Lennicott, behind her, slanted up against a doorpost, and Mrs. Lennicott, kneeling on the bandbox, tied the lid securely down with a length of yellow ribbon. The parrot was very quiet in there: perhaps it did not want to go home either.

"This seems quite safe, I think," said Mrs. Lennicott, handing her the bandbox. "But don't carry it by the string. I hope this hasn't all been very tiring for your parrot; I didn't think it looked well."

Eleanor repudiated the parrot—did she then so reek of what was Mrs. Willesden's? "It's not the sort of thing *I'd* ever keep," she said vindictively. "I'd like to have a greyhound, or a large mastiff. It belongs to a lady, otherwise it wouldn't have mattered at all. Now I must take it home. . . . I—I really ought to take it home before it begins to make a noise again. . . . No, really, thank you very much, I mustn't wait for anything to eat."

"Not *fruit?*" marveled Mrs. Lennicott. It was like being held back by a thousand hands, they both so evidently wished to detain her. Nobody had ever reached out for her like that so eagerly; she did not want to go back to that house of shut-out sunshine and great furniture, where the parrot was carried royally from room to room on trays and she was nothing. But it was useless, not an inch of their way and hers lay parallel; to catch at them would mean, ultimately, only another of those wrenches. They had struck out across the open country, and it was so green there. Eleanor felt her feet aching from the highroad.

All that they were suggesting, actually, was that she should go down with them to the dining-room and eat figs, but it was not without remembrance of Proserpine that she stood mulishly and shook her head. She had shared a roof and breasted the clouds with Mr. Lennicott, and now she must be home in time to carry up the parrot and the breakfast tray into Mrs. Willesden's room. How world lay overlapped with world, visible each from the other and yet never to be one! Then along the wind, through the trees of the gardens, came booming out the Philpots' breakfast gong.

No one spoke of meeting any more: had she, too, been a magical interlude for the Lennicotts, over which their lives would close? They went down to the garden, and the prints all down the staircase, flitting past her eyes regretfully, whispered, "Stay, stay, stay!" And when they were out on the grass, and pointed out the path that ran to the gate and the gate standing wide to the road, fear returned to Eleanor. Should she come forth publicly out of those gates into the now-awakened road, carrying this radiant bandbox?

"I think the back way would be really shorter," murmured Eleanor.

"*Back* way?" said the Lennicotts.

"Over the wall . . ."

MRS. WILLESDEN shut her windows on going to bed at nights, and it was Eleanor's duty to open them next morning, just a very little, when she brought in the parrot. Entering Mrs. Willesden's bedroom for this purpose, one found it difficult to believe that the winds and dews of May were a reality, or that there was running water anywhere and the shining bodies of bathers, or vigorous laughter, or open country—or roofs. The room was dim with seemly crimson curtains, and Mrs. Willesden's wrappings lay ready to be put on, sheath by sheath.

"Polly's looking very well today," said Mrs. Willesden as usual, following the cage across the room with her eyes only because she could not turn her head among her shawls. "Pretty Polly, pretty little Poll-poll!"

"It got out," said Eleanor abruptly. Mrs. Willesden would have to know, lest otherwise she might find out; she was, moreover, one contemptuously knew, a kind old lady.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Willesden with placid admiration. "The naughty pretty! Did he go flying far away?"

"I brought him back," said Eleanor. "He flew round and round the garden."

"Looking for his banana trees and coral reefs, poor pretty boy!" sighed Mrs. Willesden. "And so you caught him, Eleanor? That was very smart of you, with nobody to help. No one knows where he mightn't have flown to: he might have met the most terrible people and never have come home again. And if strange people had caught him, even people quite respectable and honest, it would have put me in an embarrassing position; under compliment, I mean. I know it may be foolish and old-fashioned of me, but I do very much dislike being under compliment. So you caught him all alone?"

"Yes," said Eleanor. "He didn't give me much trouble. I—I caught him all alone."

The parrot, rising on its perch, beat its wings and cried in a hoarse voice "Minnie, Minnie, Minnie, *Minnie?*" It ended on a note of regret and bewilderment.

And Eleanor put down its cage quickly, and walked over to the window. It was like the crowing of the cock.

That Old Bluffer, Fate

IT TAKES but little sunshine to cheer a gray day. Yesterday I sat at my window to write awhile. A teamster passed by, and, seeing me, waved a hand and cried a brief greeting.

I don't know who he was nor he who I was. It was noon time, and hazy, hot, and still. But in the instant of his greeting I forgot the summer's dust and heat and was again a small boy seated on an old wooden gate watching the drovers take their herds toward the little market town in the dip of the valley beyond. There was golden light on oak and elm and hawthorn. The grass was green below me. Behind, an apple orchard, broken to pink blossoming, made fairyland. Everything was fresh. Old men nodded to me, hobbling along all bent over upon their staves. Young men waved a hand or a ragged hat. Cattle lowed and dogs barked. From the town in the valley below came the cheerful chimes of an old clock in the market tower—and all through the quick greeting of an unknown laborer the summer world was turned in an instant backward along the years to childhood!

I wish that there were more folks with a smile to spare to a fellow traveler. So many folk wear ever a frown and a downcast eye; it is so much nicer to wear wrinkles in one's old age that were put there by laughing! So much better to have an eye for the break of the dawning and the gay lights of sunset than to be forever staring at the hieroglyphics printed in the dust!

I think that folk are apt to let life get the better of them, bowing to Fate where they might well enough leave Fate to do the bowing. For I believe that man, browbeaten and bullied, ridiculed and jeered at though he may be, is master of his Fate. Fate like any other bully—and most misfortunes are little else than bullies—is naught but a bluffer. Met by a laughing face, and a bright, determined eye, he'll turn a disappointed back.

Faith, Hope, and Charity are fair enough; but unless each could smile she would not be a very taking maiden! Their Father was, I think, a Heartache, and their Mother Laughter.

Certainly children should take after each of their parents.

Bill Adams.

Society Stuff

Acting as Love's Messenger for a Film-Struck Débutante Was No Part of Milton Glaze's Plan When He Set Up as America's Youngest Motion-Picture Producer

By Gayne Dexter

Illustration by S. George Phillips

SURVEYING his Broadway showcase, Floren, theatrical photographer, deplored the male portrait that intruded among Follies beauties and marred the pristine innocence of soft-focus and gauze. Milton Glaze did not belong there; ergo, he was there, with a card to proclaim him America's youngest producer of motion pictures, by whose art great visions reached the heart of the world through its eyes. Milt himself wrote the caption. They were heartening words. He could die as lavishly as he had lived; years hence recall the pomp of his departure. If performances failed to justify the claim, appearances were irrefutable; for no man could gaze so onwardly and upwardly without having consciousness of eternal mysteries, nor his derby fuse the lighting from top and side as a halo unless the mind beneath had achieved sublimity.

"You done a good job," Milt had said to Floren on first beholding the prints. "It's got the stained-glass window touch. When they see that in your showcase you'll be trampled to death by poets and leading men trying to kid themselves it don't take brains to look that way. . . . Say, Floren, didya hear I'm quitting? A guy can't keep his self-respect and stay in pitchers no more! I'm through."

He hoped for emotion. Floren hoped differently. "Then you won't need this in my showcase," he suggested, indicating the portrait wherein he found neither profit nor joy. Having delivered a stipulated amount of publicity in theatrical journals and obtained for Floren photographer's credit beneath twelve screen stars' portraits in film magazines, Milt had earned a free sitting with a showcase display, three weeks guaranteed.

"Betcha life I do," Glaze insisted. "You oughta pay me to let you use it."

So for three weeks the photograph remained while new revues opened and showgirls, storming every nook and cranny for publicity, wept that Floren should accord any man preference when they paid just as much and displayed so very much more. Not only was Milt in the case but beside it. Feigning accidental presence, he stood hour after hour and if by chance some one did inspect his portrait, he greeted an imaginary friend among passers-by in accents loud and Thespian:

"Why, hullo, old chap! How do you do?"

A little store-clerk was smitten to awe. "Gee, Mamie! Dat's de guy."

"Goo' Gor'!" gasped breathless Mamie.

It took Floren several says to dislodge Milt. Only his shadow lingered while his substance drifted about publicity departments, forgiving the motion-picture industry.

And what happened? Ask him, willya, what happened? Lotta punks! A guy gave them his heart. They squeezed the loving kindness out of it and handed it back like a piece of cat's-meat. Well, they'd learn when it was too late. Wayne, that oil-can who was director of publicity and advertising for Supernal, he'd learn.

Milt had been talking to him about a job when a staff-call came to review Supernal's stupor-feature "Marry and Pay" in the projection room. Milt toddled in, too, to spill off ideas for stunts and ballyhoos fast as popped. Yup, he was that sort of guy, always ready to help a friend. After he'd shown them how to put "Marry and Pay" over for a fare-ye-well you'd expect them to swing a job his way, wouldncha? Did they? He'd tell the world they didn't. Wayne grabbed off all Milty's ideas, then gave him the ozone!

Definitely Glaze was through.

RETURNING to the Hotel Tenelba, he collected all the paper in the writing-room, all the pens and two bottles of ink. After a challenging glare at the magazine counter, he went upstairs, locked his doors and within narrow walls close-pressed by chair, bed, desk and dressing table of monastic severity but for the hoops where glasses had stood and scars that cigarettes had burned, he divorced himself from Broadway. The old street would never seem the same. Hunches, stunts, ideas? A few perhaps there'd be; none born of the genius now diverted to literature.

"Milton Glaze, author of," he rehearsed, scrutinizing his photograph at arm's length. "A two-column cut in the lit'ry supplement ud paralyze those poor hacks that square editors with cigars for a five-line notice. None of that stuff for me. From now on editors pay me heavy dough."

Yet the despondency of farewell persisted. Gloomy, ennobled, his mood was for a masterpiece.

The gink who wrote "The Raven" musta felt that way.

"The Confessions of a Manicure Girl," Milt spelled out, then nibbled his thumbnail for further inspiration. Gradually the title lost puissance; the idea, too. From orange-stick to polisher, manicures revealed sufficient of their private histories to weary any one except out-of-town buyers. He sought direr revelations.

"The Confessions of an Opium Eater," he began again, hesitated again. That had been written before. By Quincy Todd or Quincy Adams Sawyer, wasn't it? Huh! Was this gonna be like the fillum game, too: everybody stealing Milty's stuff?

Between cigarettes and peeps at Broadway, more difficult to renounce as light sprang out and smoking mists drifted past his window, he became movie star, chorus girl, artist's model and gold-digger. All too trite. He listed intimate vocations, ladies' hairdresser, chiropodist, nurse; but discarded them as unworthy of his pen. Literature was to be knocked for a row of joss-houses. He craved red fire. Crumpled paper grew into a hill and another hour's concentration evolved no more than an unfinished title, "The Confessions of . . ."

His cigarette smoldered upon the desk. A thin blue wisp that rose unwaveringly to join a drooping cloud, caught and drew his eye; receded; wove a fantasy of arches, rites and cowled forms beyond. Scorched varnish offered incense. The smoke-wraith sank to ash of altar fires. Milt dashed out words, stood off to visualize a title that blazed not in type but in electric lights.

" 'The Confessions of an Unfrocked Priest'! Hot dawg!" He grinned and blew as if to cool burned fingers. "There's one pitcher that ud play Broadway for a million years, but there's one pitcher I'd be scared to take into the sticks. Zowie!" Milt's literary career never survived the pause. The window beckoned him from the desk. He tiptoed to within a pace or two, now listening, now alternating between one reflection framed by the mirror against desolate hinterlands, and another that lived beyond the pane amid iridescent fog, a spirit of meteors wealing the sky to names and dancing shapes.

Tom-toms of Broadway were beating. Milt's voice triumphed with them.

"Wise guys! Fillum experts. They know what the public wants. So busy they work in their sleep. Yup; and never wake up. One hundred million red-blooded Americans have quit writing scenarios to blurb out confessions and the pitchers ain't heard about it yet. You show 'em, baby. Hunches, stunts, ideas! Le's go, Milty. Le's go" Around the room he circled, thinking, talking, snapping his fingers ceaselessly. "The priest's out. Couldn't get away with it in movies, but there's somepin else that's snappier. Confessions of who? Who-*who*?"

THE telephone rang. A lady wished to see Mr. Glaze downstairs. "She looks like a million dollars," the operator said, answering his demur.

Which was nine millions less than Adrienne Buell would inherit unless her father avenged the ultimate outrage with disherison. The nature of that indignity Augustus Buell scarcely dared imagine; but it must come as surely as an honored line ended in a daughter who attributed her lapses to ancestral misdoings, or even to some suppressed urge of Augustus himself—infamous and absurd!—and who trumpeted the doom of caste through the longest cigarette holder ever manufactured. Since no Buell ever had disinherited another, Adrienne felt secure, however. To happen now all events must show a precedent from the glacial period, when, so she believed, the Buells established their immutability, proceeding from generation to generation with a glacier's majesty and chill. The family gallery in their Fifth Avenue mansion she called the Artic zone.

At sixty Augustus Buell held no hope for his house; at eighteen Adrienne was glad of it, but of little else. Life disappointed; it denied originality. Psycho-analysis visited the sins of the children upon the fathers and, pitying their accumulation yet without wishing to hamper her own festivities, Adrienne decided to help bygone Buells to heaven through one transgression for which they could not be blamed.

Even had her card conveyed nothing to Milt, her face by downward curves of culture would have denoted the society, rather than the amusement, page. Oh, pretty enough, but loose with the wisdom a stage-face hides.

"The Buell bimbo," Milt murmured, and blinked, thankful that he had changed his collar but too dazed to ballyhoo their progress through the lobby to her limousine.

"Drive anywhere for hours," Adrienne instructed the chauffeur.

"Along Broadway first," breathed Milt, sitting high as a public spectacle. Broadway was too short, Central Park too dark in the moments of his glory. Without speaking, the girl studied him until her wrap slipped artfully to reveal a curve of shoulder, which she desired him to translate into camera values also.

"Well, will I do?"

"Do what?" hazarded Milt.

"Why, I thought I mentioned that. When I saw your photograph I decided I couldn't live another day without meeting you. Floren saved my life by giving me your address. As the youngest producer of motion pictures and something else that is all blah to me, you naturally need a star, On the other hand I need excitement. So simply, I am your star."

GLAZE shot forward. Of course Adrienne expected enthusiasm but none quite so vigorous. "Aren't you thrilled?" she said. "My friends will be, too."

"Yup. I'm so crazy over it I'mgonna sue you for wasting my time," he growled. "Ten million dollars ain't worth a phony subway slug in the movies. Now listen, kid," he entreated against her dismay. "You society dames got the wrong slant. When the camera looks at you it don't see your bank-roll at all, and the Four Hundred never yet produced a face that ud look like ten cents beside any little half-starved extra-girl. Course that don't apply to you." And floundering for the soft excuse he discovered, "But still you ain't—you ain't the type. . . . I was working on a big proposition when you called, so do you mind running me back to the Tenelba or stopping the car so's I can get out?"

"It keeps going and going and going," asserted Adrienne and ordered the chauffeur through the tube, "Along the Post Road as fast as you like." The car's leap tossed Milt among the cushions. Of a sudden buildings, street lights, people came and vanished in furious procession and, when he looked at Adrienne, she was folding bills. "For any motor-cycle cop who can catch us," she stated. "Now tell me another reason why I can't be a star."

"The public don't want you!" Milt championed democracy against capitalistic oppression. He stood for the freedom of the screen, and treasured each word for subsequent repetition. The fillum game ud laugh how lil Milty bawled out Miss Billion-Dollar Buell. "Fans ain't interested in you. You belong in the society column that nobody reads but yourselves."

"Oh! And when we are divorced the newspapers feature us just to flatter us."

"But you don't get divorced in the movies. You upstage everybody and walk off the lot if you're told to wear a bathing-suit."

"Naturally. We object to being overdressed."

Milt glared and subsided; Adrienne settled back with her feet resting upon the opposite seat, her cigarette holder almost perpendicular in the air.

"Have you the hip-and-flask disease?" she inquired casually.

"Have I the wha-a-at?"

"Oh, the movies will catch up with that some day. Never mind; I'm not really thirsty. . . . What do you do when your stars go on wild parties, Mr. Glaze?"

"They don't! Party stuff is the bunk," he derided. "You believe it because you read it somewhere just like the mob falls for society shocks that the Sunday supplements publish. You don't tell me they happen."

ADRIENNE'S smile told all and none. "If the Sunday supplements said I kidnaped a producer, then dropped him sixty miles from anywhere because he wouldn't put me in the movies, you wouldn't believe that, either?"

Milt certainly would. He stared through the window. Sixty miles constituted a fair week's walk, whereas sixty years seemed a sentence unduly harsh for strangling a girl whose slyly scoffing eyes and disrespectful undulations from head to feet provided justifiable cause. They rode in silence. Wheels purred a measure to which his mind set words, repeated a hundred times in a hundred furies that he had been abducted from a grand idea, until, lips no longer able to restrain his desperation, he chanted with the rhythm of the car: "Confessions of who? Confessions of who? Confessions of who?"

"Sap!" Surely laments hit a mountainside. Back rolled the echo in Adrienne's voice, "Confessions of me—confessions of me—confessions of me."

Adrienne Buell sat transfigured. Or so Glaze saw her. "Kid, you said it!" he gasped. "I'd 'a' thought of it myself in another minute, but we'll let that go. It's your idea. Now for the brains. Wait! Park your car while I think. . . . Awrightee." Hands and tongue were eloquent. "Come back all I said about the public not wanting you. They do when you hand them the dope. We'll shunt the Sunday supplement into the movies and star you. Kid, kid, close your eyes and pipe this title on twenty-four-sheets all jazzed up with midnight bathing parties and your family crest. 'The Confessions of a Fifth Avenue Flapper, by, with and about Adrienne Buell, the Ten-Million-Dollar Deb.' That's society stuff on the half-shell. Oskosh will play a return engagement and we'll knock 'em pie-eyed in South Havastraw."

"Hold my hand. Oh-h-h, feel that thrill!" Adrienne's cigarette holder wabbled to her excitement.

"You gimme the facts, everything you know and done, and I'll work up the scenario," Milt raced on. "Tellya what. Line up all your cake-eater friends as extras so the atmosphere's O.K. We'll shoot exteriors at your place in Westchester, dragging in all the bum counts and fash'n'ble divorcees. Then we'll crash Nooport, Southampton, places that location-men couldn't bust before. That's our stunt. Nix on the old hokum unless maybe for a happy ending we fade-out on you being welcomed back by your papa—prodigal daughter style."

Adrienne's feet stamped applause. "And wouldn't it be a wonderful finish if, after father's forgiven me, my coat falls open and he discovers I've traveled all the way from Palm Beach in a bathing-suit."

Milt revered her. "Kid, you was born for the movies. If a gag-man had a hunch like that he'd ask a thousand dollars for it. Le's see now. You're the star and for leading man I'll—"

"I've thought of that, too," she interrupted. "It must be Pierre Lengarde."

"That he-vamp!" Milt protested. "I seen him today in 'Marry and Pay.' Fair; but he ain't well-known enough. You need a different type, anyhow. There'll be enough lounge-lizards; for contrast we'll have six feet of Noble Norman, who loves you but is too poor and proud to speak. Do you get that sob? Heart calling to heart, cut-backs of you at a petting party while Norm trades his collar buttons to eat so's he can finish his invention. Then by his influence he reforms you."

"He does nothing of the kind!" declared Adrienne with finality. "This is a real-life picture. Therefore no one reforms me. From first reel to last I insist on being perfectly sinful in the arms of Pierre Lengarde."

"But he's on the Coast. No sense in

bringing him to New York when there's twenty names available here worth twice as much at the box-office."

Her interest waned. Gathering the wrap about her shoulders, she banished Milt and the fortune he seized from the air with conjurer's hands. "After all, I don't want to be a star," she pouted.

Milt recognized the symptoms. "Kinda soft on that wop, huh?"

"He's adorably wicked and mystic and foreign," she revived in Lengarde's defense. "I hate every woman he kisses on the screen and when he comes to New York I'll never, never, never let him go. Why, but for Pierre I wouldn't think of movies, but that's the only way I can meet him. So there!"

"Well, I ain't arguing," he soothed. "I always believe in a star liking her leading man. Makes the clinches convincing. I only razzed Pierre to be sure you were strong for him."

Then strangely Milt lost warmth. Aloof, preoccupied, his attitude disturbed Adrienne through a silence which he enforced with disapproving gestures whenever she murmured or sighed audibly for Pierre.

"I been thinking," he smiled regretfully. "Being an idealist, when a hunch hits me I get carried away. I forget about costs. That don't mean money, but prestige. The public expects me to produce the best. I owe them all I got here"—tapping his heart—"and here"—his head. "Men ain't born that can treat that responsibility lightly. S'pose you flivved, I'd be out around a hundred and fifty thousand dollars; but that ain't so much as what ud happen to my reputation. I'd lose both. . . . Yup. . . . No. Guess you ain't a business proposition, girlie. I'm gambling too much. . . . Sorry . . . Sorry."

This sorrow he carried into another deep span. He stroked his chin, shook his head, each shake a negation of Adrienne's hopes and Pierre Lengarde's matrimonial prospects. "It might be arranged," he spoke thoughts that seemed purely for himself. "Her money against my rep. Now if she put up—*H-m-m-m!*"

"Yes, yes. Let me do that," she offered eagerly. "Father would—might—if you explained."

Hooked!

Didn't he put that over great, huh? Lil go-getting yeast-cake, Milty; watch him raise the dough. "Lead me to papa," he condescended to Adrienne.

IT WAS not what Augustus Buell said after Glaze had followed Adrienne through rooms of grandeurs that led Milt to believe he was stepping from one society drama into another; nor did any show of force propel him back through halls grown queerly impregnable, so fearsome of arch and ceiling that departure was a matter of sniffle and run as a man scurries beneath a thunder-cloud. There was neither word nor force from Augustus Buell, nor yet the butler's foot. (Sa-a-a-ay! Milt wished that guy had 'a' kicked him. He'd 'a' shown him somepin!) Nevertheless the wiz of the pitcher business reached Fifth Avenue erect, certainly, but with a feeling that only recently had he picked himself up and that his hat should be in the gutter.

The wrought-iron and glass door, curtained in lace, gave no hint of supernatural violence behind; dim columns and cornices maintained a hush akin to inner somnolence through which Milt had twanged a moment or so ago, Adrienne preluding:

"Father, this is Milton Glaze, who wants to speak to you."

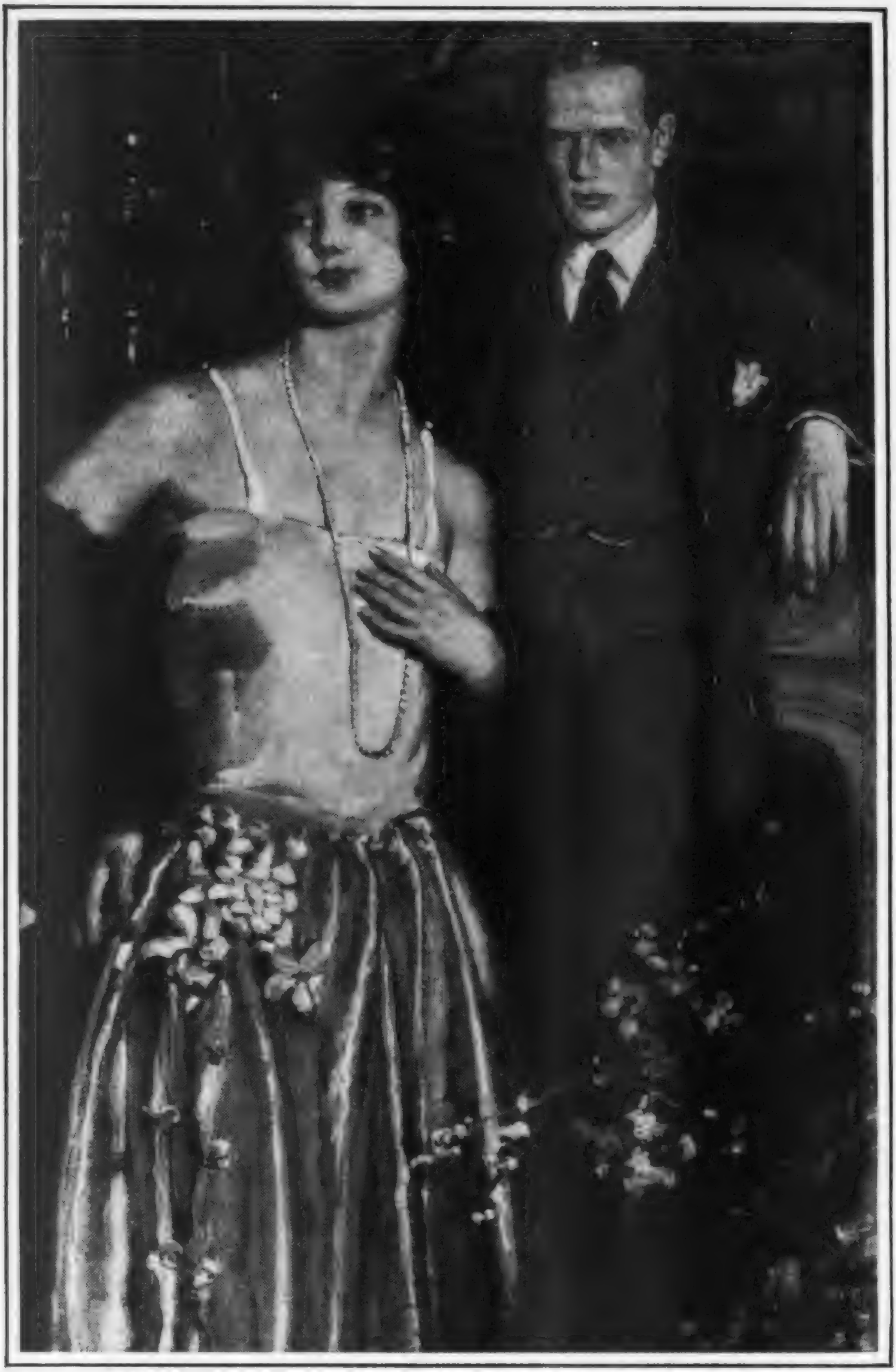
Just a nod.

"Pleased to meetcha, Mr. Buell." He'd made it snappy as a vo'ville act. You know: enter, strut your stuff, exit. Big men admired you for that. Never even parked himself on the furniture. "Mr. Buell, me and you oughta be able to get together on a little deal that'll net us quarter of a million apiece, and I'm letting you in on the ground floor for a hundred and fifty thousand. Howzat strike you?"

Just a stare. Fish-eyed old gink!

"Now your girl Adrienne here ain't Corinne Griffith on looks, but she uses her dome, and between me and you that's unexpected in bimbos these days, huh? Now get this. Listen good. You put up the jack and I star her in the niftiest fillum sensation that ever sneaked by the censors. Maybe down in Philly they'll kill it, but we still got forty-seven states and foreign rights, so we won't worry about Philly, will we?"

Just a lift of Augustus's brows. Can you beat it? A butler's standing there with Milty's lid.



Didn't he put that over great, huh? Watch him raise the dough. "Lead me to papa," he condescended to Adrienne.

On Fifth Avenue Glaze clutched his coat and shook himself within it. Cold. Wind mourned across Central Park. Broadway's glare rose, a distant, unattainable comfort, but he went bewildered and, arriving, trod familiar streets unreally. "He can't treat me like that," he was saying to the ash cans and light standards, when an acquaintance jabbed him to animation.

"Where do you buy it, Milty?"

"Buy nothing!" he rasped, starting angrily through the crowds. "I just been talking to a warmed-up corpse."

FOR twenty-six years spent between Seattle and San Francisco, Pierre Lengarde considered himself victimized by his parents at baptism; and when two more years around Hollywood studios, where names are a higher art, failed to indorse his preference for Pete, California lost a native son who sleeked back his hair, developed burnsides, languid gestures and a Continental exterior but refused to watch himself on the screen for the reason that his appearance pained him. Slight increases in salary indicated progress; his fan mail swelled to proportions requiring systematic attention. Drawing on a pipe that spread ghastly odors about the bungalow he shared with Billy Rodgers, a scenario writer, Pierre sorted two hundred letters all unopened. First he sniffed them, one by one, and dropped scented epistles into a wastebasket. His second attack consigned all pink envelopes into the basket. The remaining fifty he felt individually for lumps that betokened locks of hair, blue bows, perfumed cigarettes and miniature volumes of poetry with stanzas underscored. These also reached the basket unopened. Then there were three sufficiently guileless to encourage him to read.

"My Darling Pierre," began one; "Sweetest Pierre," another; and the third ecstatically, "Oh, Pierre!"

"Oh, hell!" groaned Pete.

When Billy Rodgers came home, Lengarde had dug a hole in the garden and into this was emptying the waste-basket. "I'm planting the forget-me-nots," he remarked, grinning.

"Virtuous lounge lizard," commended Rodgers. "Here's a telegram for you. Picked it up at the Supernal studios. And Pete, if it's some one offering you a job, take it and earn enough to buy a new pipe. That one smells terrible!"

"But you ought to taste it," returned Lengarde, opening the telegram. " 'Can give you leading rôle if your terms for eight weeks engagement are satisfactory. Big opportunity. Wire lowest figures to Milton Glaze, Hotel Tenelba, New York.' . . . *Um-m-m!* Who's Glaze, though? Ever heard of him, Billy?"

Rodgers hadn't. "It sounds like an if-you producer—if you get paid you're lucky. Ask him twice as much as you think he can afford and scare him off."

"He ought to know I'm only three hundred; so five thousand for eight weeks will shock him."

Concussions were mutual. In the new Broadway office of Milton Glaze Productions, Inc., Milt demanded how any ham considered himself worth six hundred and twenty-five dollars a week, but wired acceptance; in Hollywood, Pierre Lengarde wondered how any producer could think that much of him and telegraphed, "Will arrive September sixteen." Adrienne Buell worshiping that message, heard heartbeats in every dot and dash.

"Just eight more days," she reckoned on the desk calendar.

Milt thumped the typewriter where society disported in Adrienne's confessions. "Yup. Then what happens?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Glaze," she rebuked him.

"What do you mean?" he complained wearily. "I'm asking you what happens after you come home from Europe with painted legs. I gotta pound this junk into continuity before Lengarde arrives. Here, sit *down*"—as Adrienne approached the door. "For crying out loud, where you going now?"

"I just remembered I promised to dance at the Ritz this afternoon."

"Steal some diamond-studded forks and maybe we can raise fifty cents," he called after her.

SOCIETY stuff! Adrienne's disclosures ceased at thrilling junctures. She always recalled engagements that must be fulfilled and, returning the next day or two days later, seldom recollected the episode's climax. Nor could Milt bridge the gaps with imaginative flights.

Old brain wasn't hitting. Sorta frozen. Queer. Every time he'd feel a hunch coming, Augustus Buell ud hop into his mind one eyebrow ahead and Milt couldn't shake him. There was a tightwad for you. Ten million bucks, yet wouldn't jar loose from a miserable hundred and fifty thousand for his daughter's career.

Milt scrawled the figure in shaving-soap upon his dressing-table mirror. It inspired him each morning, but at night accentuated failure. Here an idea was born, here it threatened to die for all his pleading and clenching, his gritting and spasmodic leaps. By necessity he struggled alone. Trusting no one, he feared to seek finance through motion-picture channels; he would be refused, his plans stolen. Front pages waited to shout, "Adrienne Buell, Ten-Million-Dollar Star of Society Revelations on the Screen." Once he wrote the story, destroyed it bitterly. Publicity would protect yet kill him; let that news go out and Adrienne also must—on the next ship to Paris in Augustus Buell's furious custody. So urging his brain, striding, breathing in Broadway and haggardly facing the mirror again, he defied reason and hated Augustus for the nod, the stare, the lift of the eyebrows that discovered to Milton Glaze his own inferiority.

One hundred and fifty thousand dollars! Written in shaving-soap!

"Gimme a hunch! Gimme a stunt!" he muttered at it.

Too soon Pierre Lengarde occupied the one spare chair in the Broadway office. He sat there, a specter of debt. Milt gulped a welcome across the ramparts of his desk and sought words to reassure Lengarde whose languid inspection ended in a straight, piercing eye-thrust. Pierre judged producers by the suites they kept. The evidence of this room was accepted philosophically. After all, he had enough strength to slay Glaze, enough money to reach Hollywood if he eliminated breakfasts en route. Milt rallied. He'd speak to this wop in his own language. National sympathy performed miracles.

"Ees only what you call temporary," he said, shrugging elaborately. "Our beeg office ees not quite ready, but it gotta da grand rooms, da carpets, da—"

"Cut it out!" requested the native son of California.

The damned faker! Why, he spoke English good as Milty did! "Well now," said Milt fumbling with papers, "about this pitcher. Your part's a wow, made-to-measure and we don't go one flight up for economy neither!"

"I'm relieved," Lengarde confided. "While you're near the machine, do you mind typing out confirmation of our agreement? Five thousand dollars for eight weeks, half in advance not later than next Tuesday, balance on completion."

Milt's lips turned. "Sure; and now you're here lemme tell you somepin. Paying you five thousand bucks is an act of charity."

"You growl as much as if you really had the money," said Lengarde casually.

Glaze struck the typewriter savagely. "We got the Buell millions behind us."

"But how far behind you?" asked Lengarde.

MILT finished typing the agreement, scratched his signature and handed the sheet to Lengarde who read with one eye, watched Milt with the other. There was unanimity: each felt robbed. The door, opening to admit Adrienne who flurried and squealed, broke the impasse.

"It's Pierre!"

Lengarde winced. Unrestrainedly, she danced before him. He supposed her to be his star. Her ebullience overwhelmed him.

"I can't believe it! You look wonderful. Doesn't he, Mr. Glaze? You're just too thrilling. Isn't he, Mr. Glaze? I've dreamed and dreamed of meeting you. I've written you letters and you've never answered them. But you kept them, didn't you, Pierre? Don't you love *Fleur du Jour?* I always use it. So my letters were really me. And now—now we're here together. Pier-r-re!"

"Pete, Pete," he begged in correction. Unheard.

"I'm so, so unutterably excited. Sometimes I'll be generous with you, sometimes I'll keep you all to myself. I've arranged for the girls to be at the Ritz for lunch; tonight there's a party at the Lido-Venice. We simply mustn't miss it. Tomorrow we'll do the polo games, back to town for a show, but we'll slip away for a little dance all by ourselves in the most romantic place you ever saw. Then for Thursday—oh, what for Thursday? I'm too thrilled to remember. There!" From her bag she thrust an engagement list upon him. "Look! Look! Morning, noon and night. Then next Monday evening 'Marry and Pay' begins at the Pavilion Theater. I'm dying to see you in it; you must be grand. We'll go to the opening and I'll be so proud of you. I've invited all the girls I hate just to make them unspeakably jealous. . . . Pier-r-re! I'm speechless!"

Pete, too. Much that he desired to utter smacked more of crude California than of the Continent. Milt felt sworn at by two eyes.

Tha's right. Blame Milty for everything.

"But, Miss Buell, we have to work," Lengarde stammered.

"Not for a whole gorgeous week."

A year would have sounded more gorgeous to Milt. "You start right away. It costs money to keep sets idle," he bluffed.

"Oh, you're silly! Father won't advance the money for another week."

Had Glaze heard aright? "Your—father—won't—" he counted his fingers. "Say that again without hysterics!"

Her brows arched triumphantly. She offered a letter addressed to Augustus Buell. "Father is attending a reunion of icebergs in Boston but he'll be home for the week-end. Hand him this next Saturday night and he'll write a check for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Yup, and stop it on Monday morning," Milt disbelieved. "Whyncha do this yourself?"

"How can I? I'm giving a Saturday-to-Monday house-party at Westchester for Pierre and father will have gone away again."

He fingered the envelope. "A hundred and fifty thousand for that? I ain't crazy. It's a hold-up."

"How dare you say that!" The merest quiver of an eyelid, visible to Glaze but not to Lengarde, tempered her dudgeon. Otherwise Milt beheld ancestral ice. Taking Pierre's arm, she led him off to lunch. Grayly he faced the ordeal. Soon Adrienne hurried back for her bag, purposely forgotten. "I had to stop you," she whispered tapping the letter. "It would be awful if Pierre knew that the way I'm inducing father to lend us the money is by threatening to marry some one"—with a meaning little laugh—"unless he does. And father knows I would, too. But if I'm there when you deliver the note, he'll kidnap me to Europe."

"Kid!" Milt glorified her. "You buh-*long* in the pitcher business."

He-vamps had their uses.

SUDDENLY Milt could weave of long shots, close-ups, cut-backs, fades and spoken titles a photoplay whose scenes unreeled in miniature between himself and typewriter keys that cheered every smash of fingers newly urgent. Milt understood the mob. Here they'd gasp, here hold their breath. He tore it from them as a sob. A laugh must follow. Hokum! Life was hokum.

The tear-and-smile stuff, Milty, eh? You oughta know.

Even before the scenario was done, he mapped stunts, sure-fire, box-office, banner stunts. He roughed out letters from Pro Bono Publico and Mother of Seven. They inveighed against scandalous adolescence. He sketched the charter of the Flappers' Defense League (Adrienne Buell, President,) and mentally formed an auxiliary in every town. Poor kids! His heart was for the picked-upon. Their emblem? Yup, a spiral cigarette-holder. The corkscrew influence. A million celluloid badges, distributed free, would propagate the design. Manufacturing companies would pay royalties on the novelty as well: the Cigarette Holder with the Permanent Wave. Some catchline! A fortune in it! Night after night Milt pitted youth and age, on scraps of paper staged home-wrecking rows. The public loved a fight.

He bought a car, a dozen suits, a seven-carat stick pin; all these from the store-windows' safer side, however. Booking agencies supplied lists from which he chose his cast at leisure, but cautiously, he did not engage the players, nor hire a studio, director or technical staff. Milt first must hold the cash in hand.

In his Tenelba room he rehearsed departure to elaborate suites and, bowing before the glass, paid tribute to himself with a bouquet of coat-hangers.

During the week Milt caught brief glimpses of his star and leading man. Always Pierre was being dragged somewhere by the worshiping Adrienne.

Yup, he-vamps had their uses!

SATURDAY dawdled. The sun hung eternally. Night hardly dark found Milton Glaze defying supernatural powers behind the Buells' wrought-iron door with one jubilation upon the bell. Serenely he forecast how old Gus's brows might receive the letter: soar off his forehead, possibly. Of his own demeanor Milt was confident.

This way: "Evening, Mr. Buell." Or maybe "Gus." Then squat. "I been commissioned to give you this billy-doo," he would say, unconcerned like he didn't savvy what was in it; and when Gus threw a fit: "It ain't bad noos, I hope." Gus staggers to the family safe and, pretty sick, writes out a check. Milt pipes it off. "Why, Mr. Buell, what's this for?" Foxy, huh? But Gus looks wise by now, so Milty ducks. He mitts the old crab, though. . . .

The butler, answering the bell, marveled at his performance. "You rang, sir?"

"Yup. Yup. Guess I musta," Milt replied, sheepish at detection. "Mr. Buell home yet?"

"Your card, sir?"

"Just tell him Milty Glaze."

The butler's head inclined respectfully. "Miss Buell has instructed that you are not to be admitted."

Glaze swallowed. The door was closing. "Here, wait! Miss Buell? *Miss* Buell said that? Say, what's the game?" Diving into his pocket. "She gave me this letter for him."

"She also gave me a message for you, sir," the butler said gravely, "that she has changed her mind and has decided not to appear in moving pictures. She also suggests that you read the letter yourself."

Noiselessly, finally, the door rejected Milt, who paused on the step ripped the envelope and read:

> DEAR FATHER:
> This will reintroduce Milton Glaze, your son-in-law unless you finance my picture. You'll love his Coney Island culture, but Dad, I hate to marry him.
>
> Determinedly, however,
> ADRIENNE.
>
> P.S. Post-date the check you give him.

"She gypped me! A guy oughta sue her!" Glaze roared down the Avenue.

Mood attuned to his furious striding, he saw no impediment in himself, no reason why the house of Buell should regard him as a matrimonial threat; and when this ire passed another condemned Adrienne's contrariety. She had decided not to appear in motion pictures. Pict-u-u-ures, the butler pronounced. Glaze snarled. Adrienne had changed her mind. Why? He neither guessed nor cared, but, promiscuously hating, encountered Broadway where the Pavilion Theater's sign flashed, "Marry and Pay" — Commencing Monday. It winked a more significant message. He owed Pierre Lengarde five thousand dollars, half of which fell due next Tuesday. A post steadied him; a cigarette trembled unlighted in his lips. He watched dully.

Somewhere a jazz band wailed; somewhere a spruiker, "Hee-yah! Chinatown bus! Going right away!" Bells and jargon and gasconade, yet minutes passed before any sound rose louder than the Buell mansion's soundlessness.

"I'm gonna show Lengarde that Broadway don't make pikers but Fifth Avenue does," Glaze said slowly. Afterward he bore his typewriter from office to hotel, set it in his room and thumbed the pages of his scenario.

"The Confessions of a Fifth Avenue Flapper as related by Adrienne Buell," he typed.

Milton Glaze was an author again.

LATE Tuesday evening, Pierre Lengarde arrived unannounced. He advanced through littered paper, bread-crusts, stale clothes left where Milt had dropped them: a collar, a tie, a coat, a vest and shoes. Other garments creased about a figure slouched over the typewriter. Glaze slept. His breathing quavered among the keys. When Lengarde touched him, he lifted a loosely rolling head, a disorder of hair and bristles and red, dry eyes.

"I waited for you in the office all day," Lengarde declared.

Lurching up, Milt retrieved collar and tie, which he wound around his neck, mumbling doggedly: "Ain't got your money but I'll have a thousand for you in the morning. So's you know I'm on the level I'll take you round now to the guy who promised me. Syndicate man. Maybe I can—you see my coat anywheres?—maybe I can raise the rest. I done my best."

Lengarde pressed him back into the chair.

"What the deuce *have* you been doing?"

Slowly Glaze produced a cigarette packet, crumpled and empty. He let it fall. "Writing Adrienne Buell's confessions for a Sunday supplement. Thir'y thousand words. Gorra pay you somehow. She walked out on me."

"I caused that war," Lengarde admitted. The incident had amused him hitherto. It lacked humor now. "She pestered me to death until in self-defense I hired one of the chamber-maids at my hotel and her three kiddies. Last Saturday, when Adrienne called to take me to her house-party, I insisted that my wife and family, just in from the Coast, must come along. That cured Adrienne. She nearly fainted. . . . I'm sorry I wrecked your production, though."

"Lovely noos!" Glaze muttered.

"Have you seen today's papers?"

Milt rubbed and rubbed at his eyes. "Ain't been out of here since Sat'day night. Been eating off sandwiches the bell-hop brought up. Wha's in the rags?"

"So many kind words about myself in 'Marry and Pay' that Supernal signed me up on a featured contract, fifty-two weeks at a thousand a week, to start as soon as I finish your picture."

"Good luck, bo," said Glaze. "Our pitcher's finished."

"It isn't," denied Lengarde, jerking him to attention. "After I'd signed with Supernal, Astral Pictures offered me fifteen thousand dollars to make one production for them before Supernal's contract starts. I can't. You hold me. Listen, Glaze. Wake up. Try and hear me, old boy. I didn't refuse the Astral offer. Because I queered your show I owe you something. Go and sell your five thousand-dollar contract to Astral for that fifteen thousand they offered me. Lease me to them and keep the ten thousand dollars yourself!"

Milton Glaze failed in a glorious occasion. "Ten thousand bucks," he murmured chokily and slept.

Before tiptoeing out, Pete Lengarde gathered up Milt's masterpiece and shredded page by page. He doubted whether any Sunday supplement would buy the confessions of Adrienne Buell, because it was from a Sunday supplement that Adrienne had copied them—so she had confessed to her Pier-r-re!

For a Library Door

By Theda Kenyon

JUST back of this door is the fabled Star—
Hitch your chariot . . . travel far!

Find the blue and gold of a faëry sea,
And the languorous spices of Araby;
Or, neatly ranged in a shimmering row,
The slant-eyed Magicians of Long Ago . . .
There, the Cobra rears, with his hood aglow,
And Solomon's gems through your fingers flow;
An elfin wing in the lamplight gleams;
In a moonlit garden, Pierrot dreams. .

Books! What though cloth or morocco done?
There's a magical philter in every one!

The Law *of* Nature

A Striking Bit of Drama in Which a Humble Dog Acts the Leading Rôle

By R. K. Jorgensen

WE SAY the first law of nature is self-preservation. Perhaps it is. But behind that and above it is another law—a fundamental, supreme law. And from man down, through the animal creation to the lowest forms that creep, that law is obeyed.

The big Scotch collie leaped a full six feet, stretching the leather thong knotted to her collar till it hummed, and bared her long, sharp teeth in a vicious snarl. Before her, just outside the radius of her leaps, stood a dirty breed Indian. The collie hated that Indian, with an intense, savage hatred.

He had trapped her. With a ten-pound lump of dripping bloody meat he had coaxed her to his hand. Then, stunned, muzzled, and trussed into an uncomfortable knot, she had been thrown on a sledge. And now, two days later, a full fifty miles as the crow flies down the river, she was tied to a tree.

Tied! The big Scotch collie backed swiftly and leaped again. Never before in the four years of her life had she known the galling restrictions of a leash. It maddened her. She backed for another leap, then hesitated. With her forelegs rigid and her hind paws set for the spring, she paused. The Indian was talking to her.

"You damn fine dog!" he chuckled. "Long time look for such fine dog, Uh. Look. . . . By Gar!" He paused to lick his lips in satisfaction.

As long as the Indian talked she had crouched motionless: part of her training had been to pay attention when spoken to. But when the Indian stopped, the spell was broken. Set for a leap, she launched it. And the Indian went down in the snow!

The collie's collar parted, and four long canine teeth ripped through the Indian's trousers and heavy woolen underwear and met in the flesh!

The Indian's hand flashed to the knife in his belt. Forgotten now was his plan to breed a sledge team of huskies by mating the big collie to the timber wolf. With that hundred pounds of vicious hatred loose, self-preservation became the first law of nature. He jerked the weapon free and sprang to his feet.

But the knife wasn't needed. For with the freeing of her teeth for that second bite came the knowledge that she was free.

Free! A short, sharp whirl to the right, a swirl of snow from flying feet, a flitting yellow blur—and the collie was away.

The Indian dropped his knife and caught up his rifle. To kill in retaliation for that wound in his thigh was his only idea. Four short, staccato notes echoed across the river. Then the dead silence of the endless snows settled again on the big timber.

But the Scotch collie escaped. She was fifty miles as the crow flies from home, in a section she had never seen before; the snow was deep and the temperature had fallen at sundown to forty below. The Indian's last shot, a soft-nosed bullet, had found her—had struck her left hind leg an inch above the foot, mushroomed on the bone, and ripped away the joint. But she got away.

The Indian died. Before he could build a fire and dress the wound in his thigh, seventy degrees of frost had seared through the torn gap in his clothing and congealed the flow of blood. Gangrene set in, and spring floods carried his body down the river.

THE Scotch collie pointed her nose straight south. Though on the Indian's sledge she had been muzzled and tied and covered with blankets and never once caught so much as a glimpse of the trail, she never hesitated. She didn't lift her muzzle to the wind or drop it to the trail for scent; for wind there was none and two inches of new snow had totally obliterated the trail. Yet straight as the loon migrates, on a dead line—cutting off the loops of the river and turning aside for nothing—she laid her own direct course toward home.

The stump of the injured leg worried her. Not that it pained so much—the bullet's impact on the bone had benumbed the affected nerves—but she couldn't hold it high enough to clear the snow. Deep, that snow was. Her three good paws sank six inches before they found a pack solid enough to hold her weight. And the drop in temperature after a day of strong sunshine had formed a brittle crust, through which the raw, injured stump scraped. And it was that rasping crust that kept the wound open and bleeding and sapped her strength. When, in her teetering, three-legged gait, she was able to lift the injured leg free of the snow, the cold congealed the oozing blood and closed the ruptured veins—for seventy degrees of frost congeals instantly. But when again in that three-legged gait she teetered back, and the injured leg found the snow, the rasping crust removed the clot. The loss of blood, small though it was, was continuous and weakening.

It brought trouble to her, too. Those tiny clots of blood in her wake were fresh—a telltale trail of some wounded thing that could be easily killed—an irresistible bait for the timber wolf that found it. She was twenty miles from home when the wolf caught up.

Until then she had not stopped—not once. Came to her often the desire—the need, as she knew it—to stop and lick her wound, to warm and soothe with her long red tongue the ache the frost brought to that oozing stump of a leg, but she fought off the desire. Came to her, finally, the muscle cramp of fatigue and waning strength, but she kept going—head up and tail down, in her three-legged teetering gait, her sharp nose pointed always south.

Once a snowshoe rabbit, surprised asleep, leaped high in the air and, in the blindness of frantic desperation, ran straight across her path. She never even raised her head. Once a fox, leaving at the last safe instant his breakfast of a partridge, leaped from a circle of juniper and passed within five feet of her. But she didn't turn from her course. And once a carcajou flattened his squat body on a boulder ready to meet her attack. But, hungry though she was, she passed him by.

Behind her, driving and guiding her home, was the Law. Not the law of self-preservation, but the higher law, the fundamental law—the Supreme Law.

Then came the timber wolf.

Had it not been for those tiny clots of blood in the collie's wake, the wolf would not have reached her. Trailed her he would have, if only to satisfy his curiosity, but not for long. The fresh-made trails of the snowshoe rabbit and the fox would have lured him aside. But those blood clots in the collie's trail were fresh, and told a tale of some wounded thing that could be easily killed; and he was hungry, desperately hungry. He caught up with the collie.

Then, had the circumstances been different, he would not have attacked her. Had he been well fed, he would not have faced, alone, a dog so big as she. Or, had it been the summer love season, he would have courted her. But it was winter, cold, hungry winter. He rushed.

But he rushed just once. The collie met his rush. Crouched in the snow, her good hind leg and the injured stump packing beneath her weight a solid foothold, she waited—waited till he was almost upon her. Then, lips back from her long white teeth, jaws wide and rigid, she launched with a roar of rage her full hundred pounds of fearless fighting dog!

THEY met in the air, and came to earth in a scattering of snow and flying fur and half-smothered gurgling roars!

For a brief ten seconds dog and wolf were hidden in the boiling of the snow. Then they fell apart, and the fight was over.

The collie was unhurt. On the instant of impact, and a dozen times in the following ten seconds, the wolf had driven his muzzle into her neck. But never once had he got a grip. The long hair of the collie's

Everybody's Magazine, April, 1925

mane and the lightninglike movements of her head and shoulders—there was nothing there for teeth to grip.

The wolf quit. A coward always, he had had the courage to attack only because the dog was wounded and should have been easy to finish. Instead he had found her very much alive. Realizing his mistake, he backed away.

The collie let him go. Had she been hunting, she would have followed up her advantage, would have carried the fight to a finish. But she wasn't hunting; she was going home. She turned slowly and again pointed her nose south.

The remaining twenty miles of her journey were uneventful. There was no game to tempt her. The successful negotiation of that twenty miles depended solely upon one thing: her strength. And her strength failed her. She was less than a mile from home when she dropped in the snow.

She hadn't eaten for three full days; the stump of her injured leg had been oozing her life for eighteen hours; and she had covered, in a racking, three-legged teetering gait, forty-nine miles. The smoking chimney of home stuck up in the trail before her when she flattened out on the snow. It was then that the first law of nature, self-preservation, lost its drive.

Just so long can flesh and blood and nerves stand up under extreme punishment. Then a line is reached, a sharp dividing line. One side of that line is the love of life; on the other indifference. And beyond that line, one thing only can bring the living back, can supply the strength to fight back. That thing is the Law—the fundamental law—the Supreme Law.

It was the Supreme Law that came to the Scotch collie's aid—that raised her head and pointed her nose toward the smoking chimney of home.

The Scotch collie crawled. Laboriously she lifted her forepaws and sank them in the snow. Then her heavy body arched, and pitched forward. A moment's rest. And again her forepaws sank into the snow. She crawled.

Two hours later she reached the house. But she didn't stop there. She passed the front step and rounded the corner, and went on. Behind the house, thirty yards, a lighted lantern stood in the open door of a stable. She dragged herself toward the light.

INSIDE the stable a man sang as he fed the horses. He stopped when the collie reached the door, and watched her.

The collie never saw him. Past the horses, past the man, past a feed-box and a bale of hay she crawled. Into a vacant stall she found her way, and stopped—stopped and stretched out on her side. She had obeyed the Supreme Law.

And her long red tongue went out and licked lovingly the four hungry puppies that came to find her.

A Complete Novel in May

The Recluse of Fifth Avenue

By Wyndham Martyn

A MAN'S home may be his castle, but if it is built of ruthless ambition and chicanery, there are many loopholes for the enemy. In "The Recluse of Fifth Avenue," four brilliant men plot to regain from their common persecutor something of their lost wealth and power. How well they succeed in bringing him to terms, meeting apparent defeat with overwhelming victory, makes a story well worth your while.

May *Everybody's* Out April 15

Repairing a Family's Fortunes

The Phantom Caravan

Dreamer, Realist, Diplomat: Ammiel Proves His Competency in All Three Rôles. But as a Lover He Finds Himself Still Far From His Goal

By Howard Vincent O'Brien

Illustrations by Ralph Pallen Coleman

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

AMMIEL SPOTTSWOOD threw back his head and laughed as the lights went on and he saw policemen. What now!

Here was he, the individualist, the non-conformist, the one who could, and would, live his own life! For a year he had been plunged into the thick of big business, keeping the Bremling-Spottswoods alive while his brother Jonas recovered health and sanity in California. Half his own small fortune had endowed Padgett, married to Phyllis, the girl who had thrown him over. The rest of it had financed Adrienne's condenser, the invention of her dead father—an infringement of a patent already granted to a man named Slippak, it seemed now. And, for the sake of Adrienne, he had refused Slippak's offer to reimburse his investment on condition that he abandon the invention immediately.

And now he was caught in a drunken brawl in a dive—because he had come to dissuade Elsie Collins, with whom his brother Stephen had become involved, from exposing him and wrecking his marriage and his dawning political career. Well, it couldn't get much worse, unless Feinberger died—Elsie's real lover, he supposed, knocked out by an unknown named Sid.

The haze was leaving Feinberger's brain, and unsteadily he pulled himself to his feet. "S-somebody hit me," he stuttered. "S-somebody—" Suddenly he caught sight of Ammiel, and the purple rushed into his cheeks. "It was *you*—you—" he roared thickly. "I—"

"You're full o' hops, Feinie," said Elsie, putting her hand on his arm. "It wasn't him."

"I know who it was," Feinberger bellowed. "I know. I'll show you. I'll—" Wabbling uncertainly, he made for the astonished Ammiel.

The policeman decided that it was time for official interference. "Cut it out," he ordered, leaving his post at the doorway.

Feinberger halted, blinking stupidly. "Wha's the copper for?" he demanded querulously.

The latter grinned cheerfully. "The place is pinched—an' the lot o' youse, too."

"What for?" queried Feinberger, his rage leaving him, and bewilderment taking its place.

The policeman jerked a fat red thumb at the littered array on the table. "Ever hear o' the Volstead Law?" he inquired with heavy sarcasm.

Feinberger was momentarily silenced. Then, by force of habit, his brain functioned. " 'Tain't mine," he said smoothly. "It—it belongs to this guy." With a malevolent leer he indicated the amazed Ammiel.

"Tell it to the judge," said the policeman amiably.

"You mean—we—we're arrested?" gasped Ammiel.

One answer was the appearance of a lieutenant of police in the doorway. He nodded, and the officer nodded in turn. "All right, friends—the wagon's waitin' for you. Out wit' yez!" He clucked, and his great arms went out like the wings of a hen. Helplessly they felt themselves propelled toward the doorway.

A CURIOUS crowd had gathered on the sidewalk, and as they ran the gantlet toward the waiting patrol wagon, there was a dull roar and a flash of light.

"Oh!" groaned Elsie. "Takin' pictures! I told you to beat it."

"I've never had a ride like this before," chuckled Ammiel.

"You won't think it's so funny, tomorrow—with your picture in the paper."

"I'll be in good company," he said gallantly.

She sniffed. "Yeh—with a chorus girl an' a pug, an' a flock o' hijackers. Swell company!"

"Shut up," said a policeman, giving her a thrust.

Her answer was a stinging slap on his broad face. "Try that on your phonograph—you big flat-foot!" A guffaw rose from the crowd. She lifted her skirts and climbed into the patrol wagon.

It was a silent ride to the station. To some it was no new experience, and they essayed a jauntiness which brought no response from those to whom it was a novelty. "Aw, shut up!" wailed one man. "I got a headache." The jokesters presently subsided.

"You'll be all right, kid," whispered Elsie, pressing Ammiel's hand. "They're after the keepers of the joint. They'll let us out."

This surmise proved correct. The prisoners, in varying degrees of dejection, were lined up before the skeptical eyes of the desk sergeant, who, after listening wearily to their ingenious protestations of innocence—and their names—told them to chase themselves.

Ammiel stood irresolute, not quite knowing his fate. But he felt a light touch on his arm, and heard Elsie whisper: "For the ninety-ninth time, kid—*beat it!*"

"I take it I'm free, then?"

Her lip curled in a wry smile, and she shook her head. "As far as gettin' out o' this—yes. But you gave your right name. Gee, I should ha' told you! That guy whisperin' to four-eyes—he's a reporter."

"But you gave yours," protested Ammiel.

"Why not? They know me."

Ammiel shrugged his shoulders. "I never lied well. Shall I—see you home?"

She shrank from him. "*No!*" Her voice was harsh. "You don't know me—see? Gosh! I hope nobody squeals,"

The anxiety on Ammiel's face gave place to a slow smile. "Every cloud has its silver lining. If they put me on the front page, getting arrested with *you*—it'll make it harder for you to hang anything on Stephen, won't it?"

Wide-eyed, she stared at him. "You mean—you'd be the goat?"

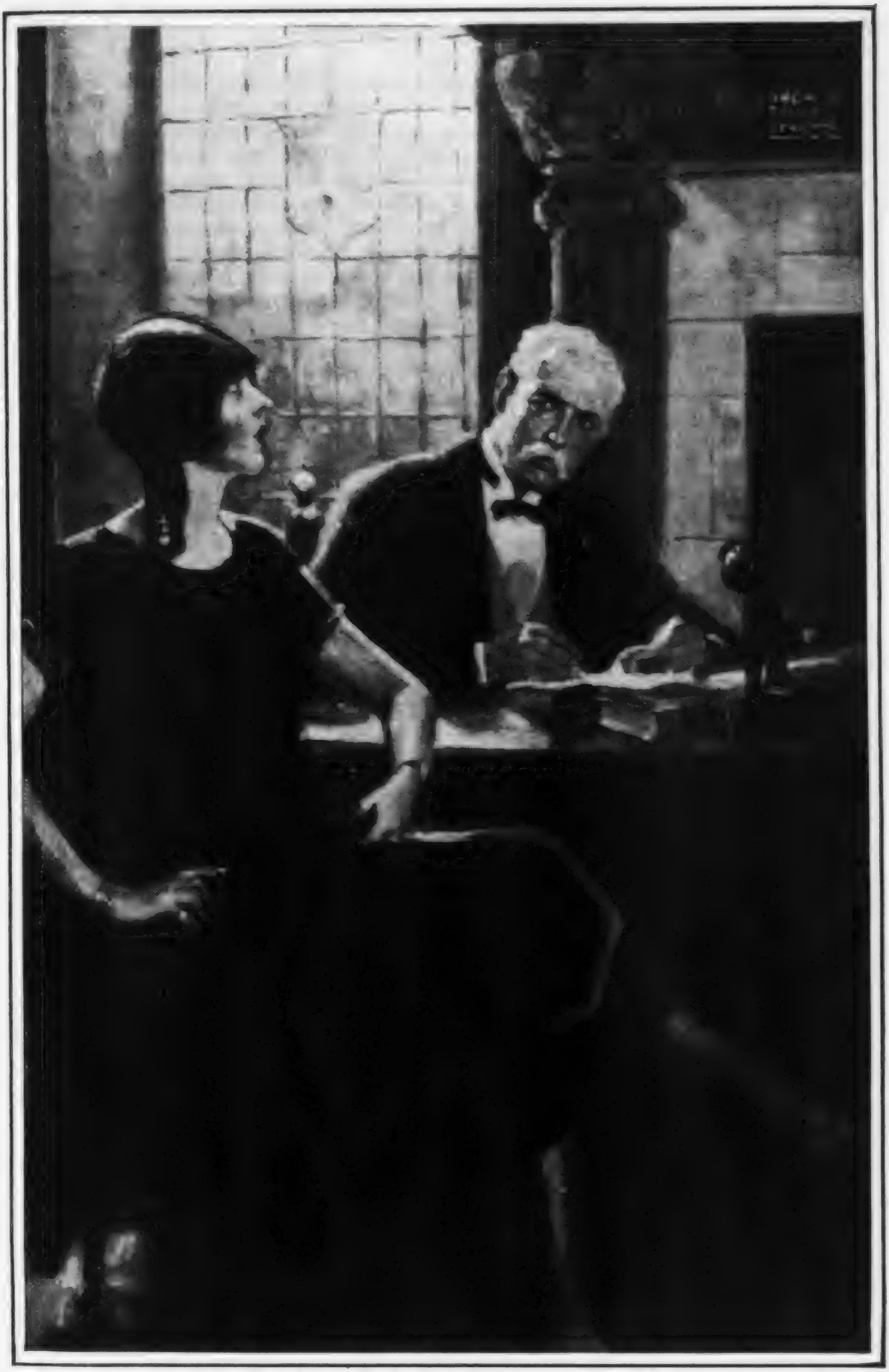
"Maybe," grinned Ammiel. "Maybe I might even learn to lie."

She continued to stare at him. Then something seemed to make her blink rapidly, and she turned away. "You're a hell of a nice kid," she flung over her shoulder in a voice that choked. "But you lay off o' me—understand? I—I'm worse than the smallpox!"

ADRIENNE, alone in her little room, was in bed, trying to forget herself in the pages of a novel. But the bright hues of romance were persistently overlaid with a reality which was not bright. Finally she let the book slip to the floor and, chin in hand, pondered.

Men, she reflected, thought constantly of the future. That was both their obligation and their privilege. Women, beyond marriage, rarely did. With that event, their individual responsibilities ceased. If they looked forward at all, it was for their children. Mentally, most women died in childbirth.

Being essentially honest, she had remarkably few illusions regarding herself. She was no different from other women. Necessity might create and circumstances foster a purely personal ambition. But that was an artificial thing, and temporary. The real, enduring ambition—an ambition as illogical and as inescapable as the desire for life itself—was for sublimation of herself in a larger unit—a man, a home, and progeny. It was the ultimate paradox that woman



Slippak was silent, staring from her to the sketch and back again. Then his eyes narrowed craftily. "Young Spottswood said all bets were off, I thought."

found herself only as she lost herself in a family.

One might protest against this, even pretend, more or less successfully all through life, that a woman, by herself, was completer than soil without seed. But her protests and her pretense must be forever vain. Intellectually she might succeed. Emotionally she must fail. And emotion was the flesh and the bones and the blood of existence.

This path of logic took her directly to Ammiel. He was, she felt, hers for the plucking. And she wondered what strange perversity kept her from raising her hand to take that which she had deliberately planned to take. Was it, perhaps, that she cared for him too much? Certainly, if she cared for him as little as she cared for Jack Baxter, she would proceed to enter the Spottswood family forthwith. The irony of that made her smile—sadly.

It was pretense, her reason told her, for women to marry for what they called love—that nebulous rose-mantle of biology. They married in the fulfilment of their destiny, choosing strength because Nature had decreed they must, security, because security was the matrix in which sound offspring were made. But this was mere reason. There were other things—intangibles—things felt, things inexpressible. Pride, for example, and—yes, love. It was futile to debate it—the end must always be the same. She could marry other men—Baxter, for instance—for what they had. Ammiel she could never marry, except for what he was.

And so his chivalrous gesture in the Thorsen condenser could not be accepted. She reached up and extinguished the light. On the morrow she would see Slippak. And since she was lunching with Baxter, it was conceivable that she might see other things, also.

The morrow was destined to be eventful in more lives than hers. To the Spottswood family, descending to their respective breakfast tables, it was cataclysmic. What had happened was as unexpected and incredible as a flash of lightning in a summer sky. The solid rock of Spottswood respectability, which had stood, gaunt and unassailable, for so many years, had suddenly crumbled. The pall of public opprobrium had been draped upon an escutcheon never smirched before.

Mrs. Spottswood, placidly opening the morning paper, prepared to read, as was her custom, the weather forecast for the day, suddenly paled and clutched at her throat.

Sarah, in alarm, cried out: "Mother! What is the matter?"

With trembling finger, Mrs. Spottswood pointed at the black headlines of the paper. "I've always feared it," she moaned. "His father feared it, too. Oh, my boy—my boy!"

"Feared what?" Sarah seized the paper. "Oh—it's an outrage! Great heavens! His picture, even!"

"IS IT a good likeness?" queried a soft voice from the doorway. They looked up, to see Ammiel smiling at them. He took the paper from his sister and scanned it interestedly. "The picture's better than the story. Whew!" He scratched his chin ruefully. "This makes me out next thing to a murderer, doesn't it?"

"Oh—how can you be so—so facetious?" wailed Mrs. Spottswood.

"You ought to be ashamed!" declared Sarah.

"Of what?" he inquired blandly. "What have I done?"

"What have you done? Oh, Ammiel!" His mother covered her face with her napkin.

"You've disgraced the whole family—that's what you've done!" snapped Sarah. "Pretending injured innocence is—is—well, it just makes it worse, that's all."

Ammiel, frowning helplessly, looked from his sister to his mother. "But—" he began. Then he went to the latter, and put his arms around her. "Don't take on so, mother dear. There isn't a word of truth in it."

She looked up, tearfully hopeful. But Sarah was less readily appeased. "You weren't in that dreadful place, I suppose?"

"The Tavern? Why—yes, I was there. But—"

"And there wasn't any brawl! And you weren't arrested?"

"Well, yes, there was a sort of row. But I—I wasn't exactly arrested. That is, I—"

Sarah tossed her shoulders disdainfully. "And this woman—this Collins person—I suppose the photographer faked that, too—holding her arm—oh, it's too disgusting!"

"I was just helping her into the—er—the conveyance," said Ammiel lamely.

Mrs. Spottswood burst into renewed weeping. "Oh—the patrol wagon! That a son of mine— Oh, dear, dear, dear!"

"Better men than me have ridden in 'em," grunted Ammiel, attacking his grapefruit. "Can't you see, mother—it was all a mistake? I just happened to be there when they made the raid, and—and—"

"But what were you there for at all?" demanded Sarah.

He put down his spoon in a gesture of surrender. "Sal, my dear, your lovely lips are never lovelier than when in repose. Ask me no questions, and I'll—"

"So—that's a question you daren't answer?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "The last of the Spottswoods has gone to the dogs. Let it go at that. You never expected anything else, did you?"

"Oh, the disgrace of it, Ammiel!" sobbed his mother. "It's just killing!"

He surveyed her tenderly for a moment, faint lines of perplexity between his eyes. Then he rose and went to her again. "Listen, mother dear," he said gravely, "I can't disgrace anybody in the world except myself. And if I'm disgraced—well, what does it matter, really?"

"Where are you going now?" she queried tearfully, as he went toward the door. "You—you haven't told us a thing. And you haven't finished your breakfast."

"There's no more to tell," he said quietly. "All the facts are in the paper. Circumstantial evidence—"

"But, Ammiel!" she protested.

He merely waved his hand, and a moment later the front door closed behind him.

He went soberly to his office. And on another street car, the person about whom he was thinking most, was proceeding to another office. The other person was Adrienne, and she was going to the office of Mr. Slippak.

THE story in the newspaper had shocked Adrienne almost as much as it had shocked the Spottswood family. She was grievously wounded in her pride, and she blushed at her own ignominy, as the idol she had set up turned to clay and fell crumbling at her feet. She had fancied that she knew men, that Ammiel, as he took her hand and looked into her eyes, had had a singleness of mind with which few men were blessed—and he had been unfaithful to her dreams of him.

Although she knew she had no claim upon him, despite his half-voiced and tentative assertions of affection, she was profoundly angered. The night before, she had been almost certain that she loved him. Now, she felt equally certain that she hated him—not for what he had done, the sordid ignominy of its revelation, but for what he was not. She hated him as a painter hates a picture which has failed to realize the intent of his brush. His humiliation was hers. He had made her despise herself. She wished never to see him again.

These were her thoughts as she was ushered into Mr. Slippak's private office. The latter, however, saw only a girl of slender figure, gowned in black, with eyes in whose limpid depths lurked an unplumbed melancholy, like still water at twilight, and whose lips spoke eloquently of laughter forever trembling on the brink of utterance. He rose quickly from his desk, extending both hands.

"My, my! I'm surely glad to see you!"

The laughter conquered, and she smiled. Mr. Slippak was altogether disarming. "Thank you. I didn't feel agreeable, coming here—and you've made me feel very agreeable.

"You were perfectly honest—as far as you went, weren't you?" she went on. "I—well, I went the rest of the way for you. I've looked up your patents. Yes, you have them. And they're perfectly sound—"

"Sound as a nut!" he interjected, his smile almost gone.

She nodded. "As far as they go. But there are one or two things—little things, of course—in ours that yours don't cover. For instance—" She took a pencil from his desk, and on the back of an envelope made a little sketch with brief, decisive lines. "There! That's what you *really* want, isn't it?"

He looked at her, his eyes blinking uncertainly. "Say—where'd you get that stuff, eh?"

Her teeth flashed in an easy smile. "You forget that I was brought up on blueprints. But you haven't answered my question. Isn't that what you want?"

He was silent for a moment, staring from her to the sketch and back again. Then his eyes narrowed craftily. "Young Spottswood said all bets were off, I thought."

"Mr. Spottswood might be persuaded to change his mind," she answered quietly, "—for a consideration."

Mr. Slippak's eyes continued to flutter. "I get you. You got an idea I could be made to cough up more, eh? But I guess you don't understand, ma'am. The market ain't near ripe for this thing yet. It may be years before we could bring it out. We—"

She shrugged her shoulders. "For fifty thousand dollars you can have what you want."

"Fifty thou—why, my dear young lady! Really—"

"*And* a royalty."

Mr. Slippak swallowed hard. Then he managed a tolerant and incredulous smile. "I guess you're kidding—what?"

"Those," said Adrienne, "are our terms. You have till tomorrow morning to consider them. If we don't hear from you, we shall make the same offer to Universal Motors."

"But my patents!" expostulated Mr. Slippak. "Your infringements. Interference! You—"

"You can fight all that out with Universal," said Adrienne unconcernedly.

"But, my dear lady! Fifty thousand! *And* a royalty! Gee, be reasonable! I might raise the ante a little. But—"

Adrienne's smile was friendly but obdurate. She picked up the envelope upon which she had drawn her sketch, regarded it absently for a moment, and then, tearing it in two, dropped the fragments in the wastepaper basket. Then she went directly to Ammiel's office. It was not a pleasant journey. It was the funeral procession of her dreams. But the ordeal at the end would be brief. Within an hour Ammiel would cease to exist for her, save as a memory—symbol of a life that might have been. She fortified herself with the resolve to be impersonal and cold.

But when she sat facing him, his eyes, full of troubled inquiry, fixed upon her, she found that the words she had so carefully prepared were difficult of utterance. Her gaze faltered, and her expression, she felt sure, must seem to him full of guilt.

HER eyes were on the floor as she began to speak. "I—I've been thinking about the condenser. I—I don't believe we can make a go of it. We—" This was not at all the way she had planned to begin, and she hesitated.

"Yes? Go on."

"The odds are against us. And so—well, I have reason to believe that Slippak might—" She hesitated again.

To her great surprise Ammiel nodded. "I know. Slippak just called me up."

"He called you up? Then—"

Ammiel nodded again. She could not tell whether he was angry or only hurt. "He—rather bowled me over," he said quietly. "But I assured him that whatever you said was all right with me."

"You said that?"

"Certainly. What else could I say? Now—suppose you go on with the story."

She shook her head wretchedly. "There isn't any story. You know all there is."

"Why did you do it?" he queried gently.

She took refuge in anger. "I couldn't stand it! You went into the thing in the first place simply for my sake. I thought then—"

"What did you think?"

"I—I thought you cared—for me," she said harshly. "I could accept it then. But—"

"What makes you think—I don't care?" His voice was very low.

"Oh, please—let's not go into that!" she pleaded. "Let's stay on a business footing. We couldn't fight Slippak. You know that as well as I do. You'd simply lose your money. And I have pride, Ammiel. No matter how rich you are, I couldn't bear your losing a penny on my account."

"The money meant nothing to me," said Ammiel softly. "As you say, I—I'm very rich."

She nodded. "I couldn't accept charity—from you."

"But you could—from Jack Baxter?" His lips hardened as he put the question.

Again she sought security in anger. She sprang to her feet. "There is nothing more to be said, is there?" she asked stiffly. "Mr. Slippak will give his answer tomorrow. If he refuses, we will go elsewhere. In any event, our partnership dissolves." She held out her hand. "I'm grateful to you, Ammiel. You have been—very kind. I'm sorry."

He sighed wearily. "I suppose you're right. You usually are. There's nothing more to be said. Only—why are you sorry?"

The question was like a blow, and she shrank from it. "Why, I—I'm sorry, because—"

"Not on business grounds, surely. If Slippak accepts, I'll get my money out and more besides. And if it goes—the royalty—I'm assuming you mean to split three ways?"

"Why, of course!" She wondered at the hardness which had crept into his voice.

He shook his head. "No, we'll liquidate the Thorsen Devices Company and return your patents to you. You can settle as you like with Thorsen. I—I'm through."

"You want complete riddance of me, then?"

He merely shrugged his shoulders, making no reply.

"Are you—angry with me, Ammiel?"

He pursed his lips judiciously. "I don't think I know the right word," he said gravely. "Perhaps I'm—disappointed. I think I should have been happier had you been more honest with me."

"Honest?" She feigned astonishment, though she knew perfectly what he meant.

"You haven't seen the morning papers, then?"

She colored, and her eyes fell. But they rose immediately, flashing with anger. "I, too, perhaps, am disappointed. And I, too, might have been happier had you been—honest."

"You might be good enough to explain that."

She thought he was sparring with her, and her nostrils flared with disgust. "It requires no explanation. You understand perfectly well."

He was silent for a moment, staring bleakly at his interlaced fingers. "I suppose I do," he said at length, his voice flat and tired. "It was natural enough. Why should I expect you to be different from any one else? I was always perfectly sure every one was like every one else—until I met you. I—I thought you were—different. That was silly, of course. You aren't different, are you? And yet—one thing puzzles me. I—"

"I must be going," interposed Adrienne. "We're getting nowhere."

"Wait!" He held up his hand. "Please explain this. People say you're going to marry Jack Baxter."

"People—know nothing about it."

"Granted. But you might, mightn't you?"

"Yes. I—I might."

"I thought so. And yet, Jack's quite notorious. He has no reputation whatever."

"He makes no pretenses," flared Adrienne hotly. "He's honest."

AMMIEL seemed to be musing. Presently he smiled. "I suppose, to an outsider, knowing the whole story, this situation would be comedy. Well—" He roused himself from his reverie. "I think you can go now, Adrienne. Our little dream-castle has tumbled. We can't build it up again. I—I don't think I'll ever try my hand at another one."

It was like him, she thought, to show no bitterness. But it piqued her that he made no attempt at defense. "Haven't you anything to say for yourself?" she demanded.

He shook his head in a slow negative. "Not a word. Why should I? What does it matter? My family is upset about me—but they've always been that. They'll get over it. And you—" His brow suddenly contracted in a puzzled frown, and he threw himself back in his chair, staring at the ceiling. "Well, you have nothing to get over."

How stupid he was, she thought—how altogether abysmally stupid! How stupid all men were! It was intolerable that he should remain mired in such ignorance. The mother dominated in her, and before she thought of consequences, words of explanation poured from her lips.

"You could understand if you weren't dead to shame!" she cried hotly—irritably. "If you had just a little intelligence! You came into my life in the first place as a sort of roving Sir Galahad. Everything you've done since, every word you've uttered, had the sort of chivalry behind it that every silly girl dreams of—and finds only in books. Did I idealize you? *Mea culpa*—of course I did. Was I a fool? Of course I was. But that doesn't make it hurt any the less to find you like all other men—sweet words on your lips and the habits of a— Oh, Ammiel! Ammiel—don't mistake me!

"I cared nothing for your morals. God knows my own are none too fine. But when, that night on the steps of my boarding-house, you looked into my eyes and wondered if you cared for me, I cared more for you than I cared for anything or anybody in the great round world. I cared so much that, doubting myself, I swore to keep you clean and sweet of soul; I might set my cap for other men—the Baxters—but you would be spared for the love of a woman with a heart as truthful as yours—some one more worthy of that light in your eyes than I was—"

"Adrienne!" Ammiel sprang from his chair, trying to take her hand.

"Wait! I want you to understand. You must—so that you will never hurt another woman as you have hurt me. It's a crime, isn't it, to obtain money under false pretenses? Well, then, it's a far worse crime to rouse love falsely. And that is what you did. Perhaps you didn't mean to do it. And perhaps my anger at you is just covering up my disgust for myself—my humiliation. Oh, Ammiel, boy! I set you so high, so far above the touch of anything sordid, that—that—"

"But, Adrienne—dearest creature!" He put his arms around her and held her against her struggles. "Your imagination—bless your heart—it's slipped its clutch! It's running away with you. If the pedestal you put me on was made out of moonshine, so is the mud you've buried me in now. All that stuff in the paper—it isn't true, I tell you—not a word of it."

She freed herself and stood eyeing him doubtfully. "What's the use of saying that, Ammiel? Why keep on pretending?"

"But you don't understand! The facts are there—but they aren't true. I mean—"

"Ah, but you don't understand!" she cried earnestly. "I don't care whether you were in that place, with that woman, or not. It's not what you did. It's the fact that you wanted to be there at all."

"Wanted to be there?" he echoed wryly. "Heavens above—I never wanted anything less!"

She held out her hand again. "Let's not argue it any more, Ammiel. Let's forget what's past and gone. We'll be friends, shall we? And each hope that the other will be luckier next time."

For reply he brushed her hand aside, and crushed her in his arms. "You're not going like that," he growled through clenched teeth. "That night—on the steps—I wondered if I really loved you. I don't wonder any more. I know. See!" Despite her struggles to avert her head, he kissed her on the lips, again and again. "Is there any doubt in that?"

"Let me go," she panted breathlessly. "Let me go, I tell you!"

"Let you go?" His laugh rose. "I think not. I love you, Adrienne. Do you hear? I love you. I'm awake now. I know what I want. I want you—soul and body. You couldn't be so angry with me if you didn't care. Tell me, sweetest, that you do. Tell me!"

"Let me go," she repeated. "You—you have no right to do this!"

"Might makes right!" he cried gaily, exultantly, raining hotly passionate kisses on her lips, her cheeks, her eyes, her hair, as she fought like a wild thing to free herself.

She did not know why she fought so fiercely. She wanted, enormously, to answer his passion with her own. Every nerve in her body ached to respond, as he pleaded for response. She wanted to relax in those extraordinarily strong arms of his, and close her eyes, and forget time and space and the fact that they were two entities, she and Ammiel. But the more she wanted to yield, the harder she struggled. Pride alone could explain it, she told herself dimly. Pride alone kept her from succumbing to the thrill of his body against hers. And at the touch of his hot breath on her cheek, though all but gone in a delicious intoxication, she exerted one last convulsive effort of—pride—and thrust him from her.

HIS hands, locked behind her, had slipped. He stumbled backward, struggling for balance, tripped over an upraised corner of the rug, and fell back against the desk, his arms waving blindly for support.

"You mustn't, I tell you," she panted. "It—it's contemptible!"

"You're damn right you mustn't!" said a new voice. The door had been flung open, and Thorsen, his eyes ablaze with anger, stood facing them.

Ammiel straightened his necktie. "You—you ought to knock, I think, before you come into closed rooms," he said mildly, doing his best to overcome a quite natural embarrassment.

Adrienne had sunk into a chair. She was

trembling, and had covered her face with her hands. Thorsen went to her and patted her shoulder.

"That's all right, Marie. Don't you fret. I'll settle with this bird." He swung on Ammiel, and his voice changed. "You're a nice piece o' work, ain't you," he snapped contemptuously. "What d'you mean by it, eh?"

"You're mixing into matters that don't properly concern you," said Ammiel quietly.

Thorsen moved nearer, thrusting a clenched fist under Ammiel's chin. "Is that so? Well, I'm makin' it concern me, see? If you think you can take advantage of a girl an' get away with it, why, you've got another think comin'."

"Does she need protection?"

"It looks like it," sneered Thorsen. "You're certainly one swell guy, ain't you! I should think you'd 'a' had enough with that mess last night without pullin' this."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Ammiel. "You too!"

Thorsen turned to Adrienne. "What did he do to you, Marie?"

"N-nothing," she stammered. "Nothing at all, Clem. Please behave yourself. Really—you—you don't understand."

"But I saw you tryin' to knock him down," he protested. "An' I've a mind to finish what you started," he added, with a menacing glare at Ammiel. "Come on, Marie. I guess you'd better be goin'."

His proprietary tone stirred Ammiel to an altogether irrational rage. He shook violently when he saw Thorsen put his hand again on Adrienne's shoulder. "I think you'd better be going," he said thickly, "and going quick."

Thorsen straightened at the tone. "I'll go when I'm good an' ready," he said. "An' you—you best keep your mouth shut!"

Ammiel frowned helplessly. Here was a situation altogether novel. Invaded in his own office by a stubborn, literal-minded troglodyte, quite evidently beside himself with rage, with invasion capped by insult. What, he wondered, was the proper procedure for a person of moderate physical capacity and a distaste for scenes?

He could, of course, press a button and have the impossible Thorsen ejected. That was the logical thing to do. But a glance at Adrienne made him skeptical as to the helpfulness of logic. Absurd as it was, here were two males, struggling for the possession of a female—a triangle which fifty thousand years of civilization had not essentially altered. The button at his elbow mocked him. It represented all the artifice and organization by which man had conquered mere personal force—and in this crisis it was completely, drolly useless. This man who had challenged him might as well be clothed in skins and carry a stone hammer for all the difference it made in the stark terms of his challenge. There could be only one answer.

"GET out," he said quietly, "or I shall endeavor to throw you out—and break your idiotic neck in the process!"

Adrienne was full of instant understanding and apprehension. "Ammiel! Don't be silly!"

The glance which Ammiel gave her had all the resignation with which the gladiators must have faced the wife of Cæsar. Then he turned to Thorsen. "You heard me. *Allez!*"

He hesitated a moment, hoping that the resolution of his tone would achieve his purpose. But in Thorsen's eyes he read the futility of that. He was playing directly into the latter's hands. Thorsen's normally colorless eyes glowed like molten lava and his big hands stiffened into two chunks of rock. A grim smile played about his lips. It was perfectly clear what he wanted.

Fully understanding, Ammiel advanced a step nearer. "You heard me," he repeated. He put out his hands, meaning to emphasize his words with a push.

But Thorsen took the gesture for a blow. With a sudden jerk, his coat was off, flung to one side. "Your mother won't know you when I get through," he growled through his teeth. "You—rat!" His arm shot out in a blow that carried demolition.

Ammiel, his feet fixed, merely moved his head, and the other's fist went by his ear. "This is entirely ridiculous," he murmured, as he sprang lightly to guard. "You outweigh me—outreach me—and"—he sent a short hook which reached its mark on Thorsen's chest—"you haven't any reason for the battle."

It was a magnificent fight. Clem was the fighter; Ammiel the boxer. And the boxer would have won, had not Clem, rising groggily, launched a wild blow that caught Ammiel's shoulder and sent him down so that his head struck the radiator. He lay still, the blood gathered about his head.

"OH!" The sound of the impact rang in Adrienne's ears with the force of an explosion. She threw herself on her knees beside his still form, trying to stanch the flow of blood with her flimsily inadequate handkerchief. "Oh—hŏw awful!"

Thorsen stood swaying from side to side, blinking stupidly. He frowned, evidently trying to free his clouded mind.

"Get a towel," cried Adrienne. "And phone for a doctor. Don't stand there like that! Can't you see? He's badly hurt!"

Thorsen continued to stare at her, his eyes slowly widening in incredulity. "You—you—" he muttered thickly. "You—" He tried again to express himself, and with a faint shrug gave it up. The strange thing could not be expressed. There he stood, the conqueror. And the woman for whom he had fought had eyes for none but the vanquished. Strange! The mist was rising from his brain, and his eyes saw more clearly. He could hear Adrienne crooning to the unconscious Ammiel.

In a flash of understanding he grasped the truth—the incredible, agonizing truth. In felling the unworthy creature who lay bleeding by the radiator, he had hurt the woman he loved. That awkward blow of his had reached her heart.

He collapsed suddenly in a near-by chair, his face in his hands, and dry sobs racked his shoulders. What a blind and clumsy fool he had been! She wanted neither his love nor his protection. What she wanted was this worthless Spottswood. The thing was beyond belief—but there it was. What she wanted, she should have.

His anguish, conquered, left him, and he became his cool, competent self. In two strides he was at her side. He knelt and listened to Ammiel's labored breathing. He nodded reassuringly. "Just a bad bump," he said, biting his lip in an effort to keep his voice under control. Then he went to the wash stand, and after bringing towels went back to make himself as presentable as possible.

In a few minutes Ammiel stirred feebly, and his eyelids fluttered. "On—on the button," he moaned drowsily.

"There, there, Ammie!" murmured Adrienne. "Don't talk."

Thorsen's face twitched in a grimace of pain. But he followed it with the triumph of a smile. "He—he had hard luck. In a real ring I'd have had no chance."

It was the amende honorable, and Adrienne intuitively understood it for what it was. She raised her hand and touched his. "It wasn't your fault, Clem," she said gently.

His eyes filled with tears, and he turned his head away. Then he regained control of himself. "The thing to do is to get him home," he said quietly. "I'll call a taxi."

Her face grew troubled. "But all the people—outside. If they see him—"

"There's a stairway at the end of the hall. It's hardly ever used. Listen." Outside, there was the wail of the noon whistle. "His stenographer will be out to lunch." He went to the door and listened for a moment. "Nobody there now. We can get him out without anybody seeing him." He took up the telephone. "I'll have a taxi at the alley, in the back."

Ammiel was now making a weak effort to rise. "Oh, my head!" he groaned. "Gosh—did you hit me, Clem? Or what?"

"Don't talk," ordered Thorsen curtly, as he helped Ammiel to a chair. "You had a tumble, an' you're going home. What's your doctor's name?"

"Dr. Taplow. But I don't need a doctor! Why—"

Thorsen was thumbing the telephone book. "I'll just ask him to look in on you." Then he turned to Adrienne. "Now, I think you'd better go. No use stirring up talk."

"But—" She hesitated, apprehension in her eyes.

Thorsen smiled faintly. "It'll be all right. I—I'm cured."

"Clem's right," said Ammiel. "You'd better go."

She hesitated another moment, and then, with a last fearful glance at the two men, she went out, closing the door quietly. It had just occurred to her that she had a luncheon engagement with Baxter—the imperturbable, emotionless Baxter. How many centuries had she encompassed in that one vivid morning!

Behind her, in Ammiel's office, the two men looked at each other. Thorsen broke the silence. "Do you love her?" he demanded. "Honestly?"

Ammiel's eyes closed, and he nodded. Then they opened again. "Yes, honestly."

Thorsen went to the window and looked out. When he came back his lips were set and his eyes flinty. "The taxi's down there. Come."

Unsteadily, Ammiel got to his feet. He turned and put his hand on Thorsen's shoulder. "I—I can't talk now," he said weakly. "But tomorrow, maybe—I'll call you up; I'll make you understand. I think you have the right to know."

"I'll come," answered Thorsen grimly. "Here—take my arm."

Stealthily, they made their way to the rear stairway, and so, unseen, to the taxi waiting below.

"It's been a—an unusual morning, hasn't it?" chuckled Ammiel as they got in.

Thorsen made no reply. . . .

"MY HEAD aches like the devil!" complained Ammiel, kicking at the bedclothes. "Otherwise, I'm all right."

"You'll stay where you are," answered Dr. Taplow firmly. "You just missed concussion or a fractured skull. It was a nasty bump."

Ammiel gingerly fingered the shaved and plastered side of his head. "Old Denny McCoy, who taught me boxing, always said that after you got in the ring the object of the game was to get out again as fast as you could. Never miss a chance to land the sleeper. That was my mistake."

"Miss d'Aulignac called up first thing this morning to see how you were."

"She'd do as much for a sick dog."

"You're not optimistic, boy." The physician's face grew grim. "Answer me this, and answer it truly: Do you want this woman?"

For a long time Ammiel was silent, picking at the pattern in the counterpane. When he finally spoke his eyes were still downcast. "I never wanted anything before in my life—really wanted it. Old Padge keeps writing me long drools about what he calls my generosity. But that wasn't generosity, Dr. Tap. I didn't care about the money. And during the war, fellows used to say I had nerve. But it wasn't nerve—really. Nerve, I think, means doing things you're scared to death doing. I wasn't ever really scared, because it never seemed to matter much whether my identification tags got separated or not. I don't know—I just seemed to be born that way—not caring—about anything."

"Your grandfather called it a sense of humor."

"Perhaps. Whatever it is, I think he had it too. And yet—look what he made out of life!"

"On his deathbed, he said: 'I've always done the wrong thing. That's why I made such a hash of life.' "

"Did he say that?" Ammiel's eyes were wide.

The doctor nodded. "He did. And furthermore, he meant it. You are very like your grandfather, Ammiel."

Ammiel put his finger to his lips. "Good Lord! Dr. Tap, don't say that! The family might hear you. You—you're profane!"

"The family never knew your grandfather—as I knew him. All they ever saw was the shadow that he cast. They never saw him."

"TELL me about him." Ammiel raised himself on the pillows. "Somehow or other, grandfather did cast a shadow. Perhaps—if I knew how he did it—"

The doctor sat back in his chair, the tips of his gnarled fingers together, his eyes closed. To Ammiel, watching him, he suddenly seemed very old.

"I have spent my days bringing folk into this life, and watching them go from it," he said meditatively. "I have thought much upon whence they come and whither they go—and such like matters. And always, as the Persian said, have I come out by the same door wherein I went. I have listened politely to saint and sage, and heard great argument about it, and now, when my span of years is almost spent, I am constrained to believe that there is no answer."

His eyes rose and wandered to the enlarged photograph of Ammiel's grandfather, in its broad, old-fashioned frame of polished rosewood, hanging above the bed. "That is what he always said—to the very instant that his lips closed for the last time."

"And yet," insisted Ammiel, "he did so much with his life."

The physician nodded. "Life, he declared, had no meaning, no purpose. Our fancy that it did was but the jest of the Power that had given us imagination. But, since it had no significance, it was our privilege to give it significance. Since reason failed us, we must recoil upon fancy. Man, in his might, could invent those things which would save his soul from starvation."

"Go on, Dr. Tap," urged Ammiel. "It's odd to hear you talking this way about grandfather. It—it might be me."

"Your grandfather was skilled at mathematics. That, no doubt, explains his skepticism. He sought to reduce all things to rule and order. And it explains, too, the hypothesis upon which, eventually, he and I built our lives. Do you know, boy, what *pi* means?"

"I did once," laughed Ammiel, "in college. But I've forgotten."

"I have never forgotten," said the doctor gravely, "since the night your grandfather explained it to me. It is a symbol of relationship—the nearest to the squaring of the circle that man can ever come. Carry the decimal as far as you like—you can never reach truth. And so practical men, sensible men, stop short, take the approximation for the reality, and proceed about their several businesses."

"Life," murmured Ammiel, "a hypothesis!"

"Precisely so. We are here, we know not why. And so, because we must, we invent a reason, each for himself. To some, the conquest of obstacles, for the sake of the conquest. To others, the dream of a reward, when this dream of living shall be finished. To yet others, the perpetuation of themselves, in the flesh of their progeny. To me—I have kept true the course of my craft by a star which is not there, but which I see—because I must—a star which I call—well, let us say, minor usefulness."

"The family," mused Ammiel, "always talk of grandfather as if he was a cross between Moses on the mountain and Crœsus. Or King Midas."

"Your grandfather was a poet and a philosopher," said Dr. Taplow. "And if there is a God, he will sit at His right hand."

"You talk of steering a course, Dr. Tap," continued Ammiel thoughtfully, "of plotting it by a star that isn't there. But if you can pick out your own star, why do so many people take stars that some one else has picked for them? The world seems full of people doing things they don't have to do, and don't want to do. Not people like me. I don't care much about Bremling-Spottswood, to be sure. On the other hand, there's nothing I do care about. But take Jonas, and Padgett. And father. Remember how he was always saying he wished he'd been a doctor?"

"I have an idea, boy, that when people don't do what they want to do, it is because they don't want to enough."

Ammiel sighed wearily, turning his face to the wall. "And I—want nothing. I wish that radiator had done a better job!"

"So—you want nothing." The physician regarded his patient, a little twinkle in his old eyes. "If that were true—you wouldn't be lying abed now."

With a jerk that made him wince with pain, Ammiel sat upright. "Of course I want her!" he cried in a kind of anguish. "I can't deny it. But I—I don't know why!"

"Does that matter?" asked the doctor softly. "Does that matter in the least?"

Ammiel's reply was interrupted by a knock on the door, and the maid's announcement that a Mr. Thorsen would like to see him.

"You've talked enough for this morning," objected Dr. Taplow. "Don't you think—" But at Ammiel's derisive smile, he rose. "You're too like your grandfather for me to waste time arguing with you. Only—"

"Don't excite myself, eh? Thanks, doc. My heart isn't beating now—it's vibrating!"

The physician shrugged his shoulders, and went out of the room. A moment later, Thorsen entered.

"CLOSE the door," said Ammiel quietly. "And sit down."

Thorsen, fumbling awkwardly with his hat, complied, sitting on the edge of the chair, his eyes sullen, and his lips set in a hard line.

"Well—so you came."

"I said I would." Thorsen spoke curtly, out of the corner of his mouth.

Ammiel hesitated. It was not easy to say what he wished to say, though he had been preparing it all morning. The speech he had rehearsed had had a diplomatic and somewhat involved opening. He began now, quite bluntly. "I had asked Miss d'Aulignac to be my wife—"

"Yes." If Thorsen felt any emotion, he concealed it.

"In view of what appeared in the papers about me, she—she—oh, hell! Thorsen, I—I can't talk like a Fourth of July orator! She was disgusted with me, that's all. Naturally."

"Naturally," echoed Thorsen in a dry whisper.

"You see, at the same time I was asking her to marry me, I was playing around with—well, with the kind of people one doesn't play around with when he's asking a decent girl to marry him."

"Yes?" Thorsen's tone was interrogative and trifle bored.

"What you thought when you came in—well, I know what you thought. And I'd have done just what you did. I'd have seen red. I—I know how you feel about—her."

"Let's not talk about that," said Thorsen stiffly.

"All right. But I know how you feel, and that's why I asked you to come. There's something I've got to tell you that I don't want to tell. But under the circumstances you have the right to know it, and maybe—maybe it'll make you feel differently about me." Briefly, without marginal comment, and stating facts chronologically, he told the story of Stephen's affair with Elsie.

"You're asking me to believe that?" asked Thorsen when he had finished.

Ammiel was tired and showed it. "I've told you the truth and nothing else," he said apathetically. "It won't surprise me if you don't believe it—no one else does."

For a moment Thorsen hesitated, his features working. Then he seized Ammiel's hand. "You were a square guy, Spotty." In his voice, replacing the brassy menace, was a wistful note of pleading. "You—you don't know what that girl's meant to me. I care—an—awful lot. I'd rather she'd be happy than anything in the world. Anything, Spotty! If any guy did wrong to her, I'd kill him if I knew I was goin' to swing for it next minute. You're shootin' square now, ain't you, Spotty? Promise me you are!"

"Maybe I'm shooting at a star, Clem," answered Ammiel with a misty smile. "But I'm shooting square, so help me!"

Thorsen rose, brushing away something that seemed to fog his eyes. "Well, I guess I'll be going," he blurted awkwardly. "An' I—I'm sorry you got hurt. Well, so long, an'—good luck."

"Thank you, Clem," said Ammiel huskily. "You—you're a gentleman."

"No," answered Thorsen from the doorway, "I ain't. If I was, things might 'a' been different. But maybe not—maybe not. Well—" For the first time he smiled—a most unsuccessful smile, and to Ammiel the more beautiful for its failure. "S'long again, Spotty. Cheer-o!"

"Cheer-o," echoed Ammiel, with a wave of his hand.

CLEM THORSEN believed what Ammiel had told him, and so he acted. This business had to be cleared up, for Adrienne's sake. So, very simply, he went to see Elsie Collins. He sent word that she was expecting him—and so reached her.

"And what did you mean by that?" she demanded as he sat down. "I never heard of you before."

He nodded, smiling faintly. "I thought maybe you wouldn't see me unless I pulled somethin' like that."

"Sort of a burglar, eh?"

"Worse'n that."

"Well, what do you want?" His calm effrontery irritated her.

"It—it's about Ammiel," he began hesitantly, seeming to seek a point of departure for what he wished to say. "An' that row in the Tavern."

"Yes?" Her eyes narrowed cautiously, and with the instinct of a wild creature all her senses were on the alert for traps.

"How well do you know him?"

"Ammiel? Oh, pretty well! Why?"

"I'd like the truth, ma'am." Thorsen sat awkwardly in his chair, the disposal of his hands obviously something of a problem. But there was a quality in his voice which to her keen ears signified that any trifling with him would be inadvisable.

"Why should I tell you anything else?" she temporized smoothly.

He declined to be swerved. "I asked you a question."

"Suppose I refuse to answer," she demanded, tossing her head defiantly.

She had not imagined that a man so large could move so rapidly. In one spring he was at her side, her wrist in his calloused grip. "You won't refuse," he said quietly.

"Let me go," she cried, her heart fluttering. She was thoroughly frightened now. "I—I'll scream."

"It won't do you any good." The broad palm of his other hand moved significantly toward her mouth. "Now then—how about it?"

"Sit down and behave yourself," she ordered, trying to cover her anxiety by a show of wrath.

He obeyed, but that he was not deceived was clear. "Now—he came about his brother? An' that's all?"

"What do you know about it?" She struggled for an avenue of escape from his insistence. "I—I don't know what you're talking about."

"Or maybe—he came for himself, eh?"

"No! He's a sweet kid. Gosh! It was a shame his getting pinched that way. I told him to beat it. But he wouldn't go. Now see here, Mr. Bull—"

"Thorsen's my name."

"I don't give a damn what your name is," stormed Elsie. "If you're tryin' to hang anything on that boy, you're way off! He's as straight as a string, and don't you forget it!"

Thorsen visibly relaxed. "That's what I wanted to find out. Now—there's one other thing: What have you got on his brother?"

The directness of his attack startled her. She saved herself by turning the question. "You seem mighty interested in other people's business, Hawkshaw," she snapped sarcastically.

He gave a curt nod. "I am. An' what's more, I'm tired o' stalling. You come clean, young lady, an' come quick, see."

He spoke quietly enough, but there was menace in his flinty eyes. She was, she decided, dealing with a man more than half crazy, and she cast about for a way of escape.

HE CAUGHT the glance. He shook his head. "No use. Might as well spill it now as later."

"You might tell me who you are," she wailed plaintively. "Gosh! Are you nuts—or what?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know—maybe. But the point is, I want to know just what you got on Stephen Spottswood."

"Why?" she parried desperately.

He was merciless. His big hairy hands opened suggestively. "Come on!"

"But tell me first. I—I don't understand," she pleaded, frankly terror-stricken.

"I'll tell you nothing," he thundered, slowly pulling his big frame out of the chair. "You'll tell me!"

She put up her hands in a gesture of defense. "All right! All right. Stay where you are. I'll tell you. Steve—well—I have a little girl. And he—"

"That's a lie," said Thorsen bluntly. "You haven't any little girl."

"It isn't a lie. I have, too!"

"How old is she?"

"She's five. Her birthday's the fifteenth of this month."

Thorsen pursed his lips. "That would—why, Stephen was in France! I know, because—"

"He was here. He—"

"You're lying, aren't you?" insisted Thorsen. His voice was penetrating, but a new note of something like sweetness had come into it, a magic note that somehow dulled the sharp edge of her resolution.

She did not know why she nodded, nor why her eyes fell before the interrogation in his. "Oh, lay off me!" she begged wearily. "He was a big sucker, that's all. I never had anything on him. It was just his conscience."

"So—it was all a bluff?"

"That's all. With him, I mean. But the kid's true. She's with some people up in New York State. Good people. They—"

"Go on," ordered Thorsen, with a brusquerie that did not quite conceal the tremor in his voice.

Elsie was silent for a moment. She had slipped down in her chair, her head pillowed on her arm. "I guess it's as old a yarn as there is," she muttered dully. "The fool country girl and the slick drummer. You know the answer. I've got all I could and put it in bonds and life insurance. That youngster down East didn't get much of a start. But her mother's doin' the best she can by her—to make up."

"Go on," said Thorsen, more softly.

"That's all." Elsie raised her head and laughed harshly.

Thorsen, once he had established a purpose, never lost sight of it. "If your blackmailing Stephen was a bluff—you're through with him, aren't you?"

The question electrified her. She snapped upright. "No, I'm not through with him! If he wants to make me a loan, now and then, why, it's because he thinks he ought to. That isn't blackmail. And I'm not going to refuse it. Why should I?"

Thorsen merely stared at her, his hands folded in his lap. "You're not going to take it," he said evenly. "An' what's more, you're goin' to write him a letter an' tell him so."

Her laugh was high-pitched and defiant. "What is this—a melodrama? Say—you can't get away with that stuff!"

"You're all through with Stephen Spottswood," he repeated with quiet determination. "Let me tell you somethin', ma'am. I'm a stubborn sort. When I decide to do a thing, I mos' generally do it. An' I'll tell you somethin' else. There's nothin' people hate more than gettin' hurt—women especially."

"You understand women, don't you!" she jeered.

"Not entirely," he admitted. "But I know something. An' when I tell you that if you don't lay off this Spottswood guy, I'll just naturally beat you to a custard, why, I guess you'll lay off."

She forgot her other thoughts in a profound curiosity. "Say, if you want to keep on being mysterious I guess there isn't anything I can do about it. But I told you my story—straight. You might tell me yours. What's your interest in the Spottswoods, anyhow?"

His forehead wrinkled, as if in perplexity. "I—I don't give a damn for the Spottswoods," he said with some hesitation. Except—well, there's a girl. I—"

"I understand," interposed Elsie softly.

He gave her a grateful smile. "She wants Ammiel—he's her kind. But she thought—all that stuff in the papers—"

"It was a shame!" agreed Elsie. "But he can straighten that out."

"Yes. But there's his brother—an' you. He's worried. He—he's a good kid. I've known him a long time. Bunkies, in the army, an' all that. I—I thought—well, it seemed to me I'd like to fix things up for him. He did me a good turn once. An' then, I know—she—she'd like it. It would be—sort of a—oh, be a wedding present. You get what I mean, don't you?" He put the question wistfully, as if he felt an inadequacy in the expression of his thoughts.

It was her turn to stare at him. "Say!" she exclaimed. "I thought I knew every kind of man there was. But you're a new one. Gosh! You do care for that girl, don't you?"

His eyes dropped before her frank amazement. "That's all over," he muttered. "All over."

"And you mean—you'd beat me up, just to keep the fellow she wants from worrying?"

"It'd keep her from worrying," he said simply. "You see, she loves him."

He rose, fumbling with his hat. "Well, good-by, Miss Collins. I—I guess everything's settled, eh?"

"Wait!" She rose also, and took the lapels of his coat. "Don't hang any bouquets on yourself. It was settled before you got here. I told you I wasn't hard—not really. That boy, Ammiel—he's a gentleman, too. He—he got me. I fell for him—hard. He's a clean kid. He—well, Steve can go to Congress or any other place. I won't bother him. I couldn't—now."

"I'm glad," said Thorsen gravely. He put his hands on her shoulders, looking intently into her eyes. "That's settled." He put out his hand. "Good luck, ma'am."

"Do you mean that?"

"Sure I mean it. Why?"

"Then look me up again, will you? You don't look like a millionaire, but I think I could be friends with you. I—I could do with a friend."

Before he could answer she had thrust him into the hall, and the door was closed.

"AND now," said Ammiel, sitting like a Buddha, curled up in the old leather armchair, "the next move is yours, Dr. Tap."

"*Mine?*" The doctor's eyebrows rose.

"Yes. Elsie, for reasons best known to her extraordinary self, has taken her claws out of Steve. He's free again. But I know Steve better than I used to. How long he remains free depends on how good a doctor you are."

"*Me?*"

"Just so. You've got to do something with Cecily."

Dr. Taplow knew what he meant. He sighed.

"You mean she's got to give him what she's made him turn to the Elsies to find? Well—I haven't much hope, but I'll try."

"Good!" said Ammiel.

Cecily kept the doctor waiting half an hour; her maid thought she was lying down. But when she came in he noted two things: first, that she was dressed for the street and had therefore not been lying down; second, that she expressed regret at having kept him waiting. That was distinctly unusual. Also, he missed her characteristic languor. There was color in her cheeks, and the grasp of her hand was firm.

"You—you're looking uncommon well, Cecily," he said, unable to conceal his astonishment. "What doctor have you now?"

"I'm feeling well, thank you," was her calm reply. "And I haven't any doctor. I don't need one."

Dr. Taplow reached for the support of the table. This, from Cecily, who, since childhood, had scarcely been out of medical hands for a week on end, was little short of stunning. "I—I'm sure I'm glad to hear that," he stammered.

Her laugh was silvery—the usual plaintive note quite absent. Then her face took on a gentle gravity. "You know about Steve?"

He nodded. "That was what I—"

"Everything's all right," she interrupted. "Steve's been a very foolish boy, but—Sit down here, Dr. Tap. I have to run in a minute, but I want to talk to you first."

SPEECHLESS, the doctor suffered himself to be planted on the sofa, with a soft pillow unostentatiously placed at his back.

"Yes, he's been very foolish," she continued, her hands crossed over one knee, and looking thoughtfully away. "Not only this time. There have been others. He's told me—everything."

"Oh, he has!" said the doctor, feeling extraordinarily uncomfortable.

She nodded gravely. "Yes—everything. Of course, at first, I was terribly upset. Remember—I even talked of divorce?" A reminiscent little chuckle escaped her. "Imagine it! But I was upset. It was such a shock. I'd always idealized Steve so. It—it was simply incredible! And it seemed so—so unkind to me."

"Yes," echoed the doctor in a daze. "Of course."

"But then I got to thinking about it," she went on, "and suddenly it occurred to me—well, that Steve had done a lot of things that were wrong and foolish—no doubt of that—but that perhaps I had, too! The more I thought about it, the surer I was. And since we ask forgiveness for our debts as we forgive our debtors—"

The doctor coughed, covering his mouth with his hand. "I—I believe we are supposed to do that."

"Well, there you are! I hadn't done wrong the way he had, of course. But I had done wrong—there wasn't any getting away from that. It wasn't what I'd done, so much as what I hadn't done. That's just as bad, I think. And so I just had to forgive him, didn't I?" She raised her big eyes to his as if in a plea for assurance.

He nodded gravely, glad that his beard concealed the smile which sprang to his lips. "I'm sure you did right."

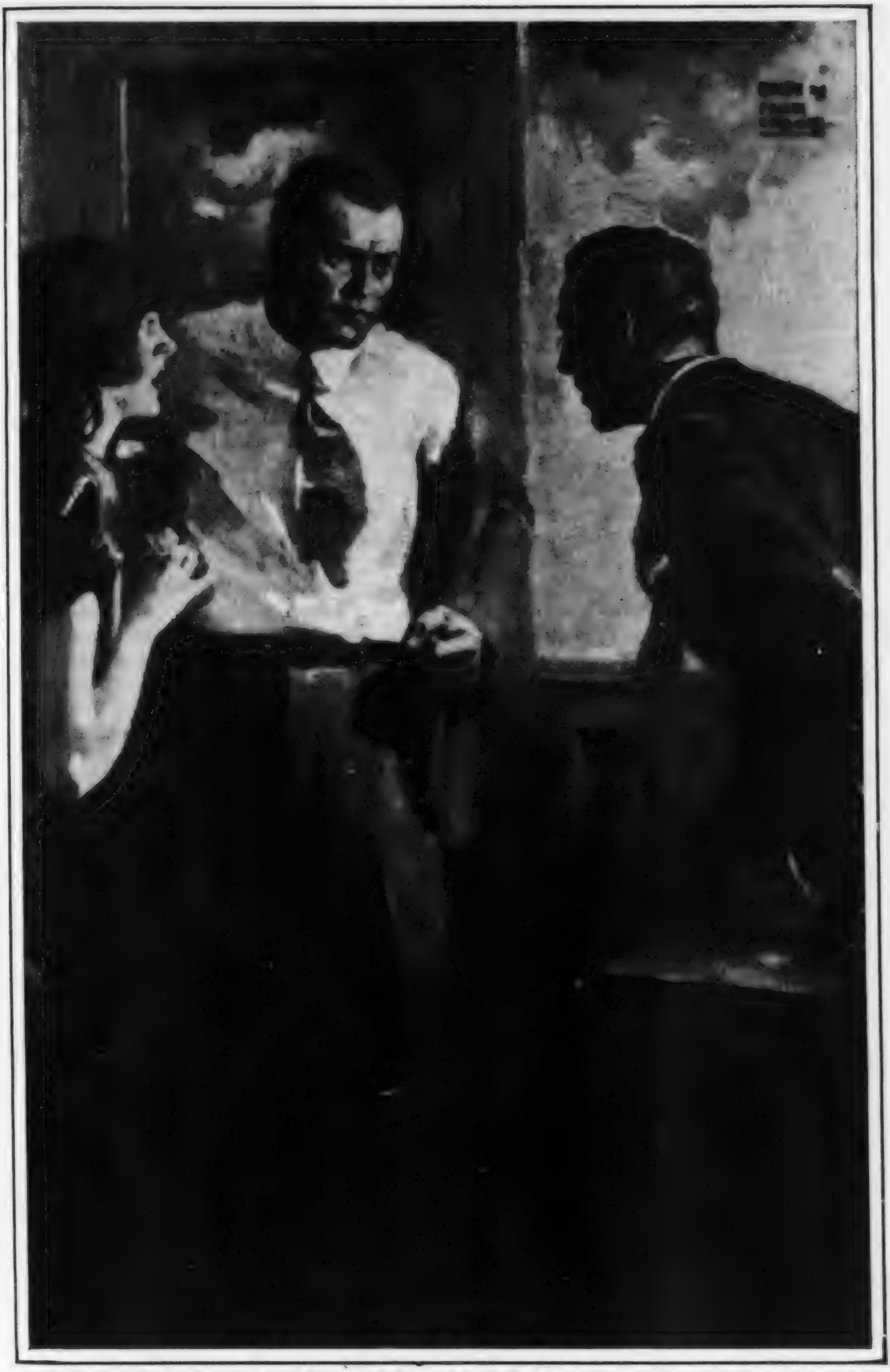
"HE WAS punished enough," Cecily continued with profound conviction. "He's really a good man, Steve is. He hated the things he did. He didn't have to tell me that—I could see it. And then—I saw something else!" Her voice sank, in the manner of one imparting a revelation. "It was as if a veil was lifted from my eyes. I saw—myself! Myself, Dr. Tap!" She spoke with a kind of awe. "It—it shocked me more than any of the things I found out about Steve. He'd done wrong. But he'd done a lot of good, too. No one knows the number of sweet, unselfish things he's always doing. Well, I'd never done any particular wrong—but I'd never done a bit of good, either—to anybody. I'd never thought of anybody's trouble but my own. I was really worse than Steve—far worse."

"Extraordinary!" was the doctor's impulsive exclamation.

She looked at him in surprise. "What is?"

"Nothing. Nothing. Go on, Cecily."

"Well, that's about all there is to it. I've been a nasty, selfish little beast—and I'm not going to be any more." Her head straightened in a toss of defiance. "No other woman's ever going to take Steve away from me. I—" A little laugh began and ended with a catch in her throat. "I'll beat them at their own game! I can! I'm cleverer than they are. I—I—well, I will, that's all. If I lose him again, it'll be my fault. But I won't lose him!"



Thorsen took the gesture for a blow. With a sudden jerk, his coat was off. "Your mother won't know you when I get through," he growled.

"More power to your arm," growled the doctor. "It appears that you have come at last to sense, Cecily."

She laughed happily, glancing at her watch. Then her face clouded. "My stars—I'll be late! I promised to meet Steve at the Club at six. You—you'll have to excuse me, Dr. Tap."

He rose from the sofa. "A sense of time, too!" he exclaimed, his eyes twinkling. "Has the day of miracles returned!"

"I mustn't be late," she explained seriously. "You see, he's speaking on the West Side, and—"

"You're to be in the audience?"

"On the platform," she said proudly, "where a man's wife ought to be!"

In the hallway she turned, as if she had forgotten something. "Oh—I've rattled on so—what was it you wanted to see me for, Dr. Tap?"

The physician swung the door wide for her. "To pass the time o' day," he answered brusquely. "What else?"

AMMIEL fingered the check from Slippak. The bit of blue paper was the gravestone of the Thorsen Devices Company. Also, it marked the end of something far dearer. Adrienne was through with him. She would presently marry Baxter. At breakfast, Sarah had spoken of that as if it were already a fact accomplished. Apparently every one knew about it.

Well, why not? Baxter could give her everything which a woman night reasonably ask. There was no reason why she should not prefer Baxter—with a town house and a country place and motors and the Mediterranean when fancy called. There was, to be sure, the sentimental factor in the matter of marriage. But he was skeptical of sentiment. It was a rosy beacon that often lured the unwary to disaster. Adrienne was not unwary. A life, varied and not easy, had taught her caution and—perhaps—calculation. She was a realist. As such, she assayed him, Ammiel, at his precise worth.

That worth, he admitted, still staring at Slippak's check, was just about what it had been the day of his grandfather's legacy. All his toil had added nothing. Even his salary remained as it had been when Jonas went away.

The check seemed to speak to him. He was not, it said with some scorn, acquisitive. He would never achieve success, as men interpreted the word. In love, or war—or the latter's civilized equivalent, business—he was marked for failure, because the indifference which had followed him from birth canceled effort.

He sighed heavily. Perhaps it was as well that Adrienne was passing out of his life. With her would go his sole incentive to action. Jonas would come back, and he could take his little fortune, retiring to a chair on some sun-flecked boulevard terrace. Jonas could make money. Stephen could proceed with doing good and the advancement of his "career." Hester could continue balancing on the perihelion of social distinction. Sarah could marry into intimacy with the "interesting" folk who "did things."

He, from the vantage point of his café table, could sip his grenadine, looking down on the hurrying world—and wonder what the hurry signified—and wonder and wonder—presently, perhaps, achieving some measure of content: which, after all, was apparently all that the wisest or most fortunate of humans gained from the journey betwixt darkness and darkness.

With an effort, he recalled himself to matters in hand. He put Slippak's check into his pocket and took up the sales figures for the month preceding. Any one else, he reflected sadly, would have read them with elation. Like the sun after days of gray weather, the clouds were shot through with a glint of coming radiance. In simpler language, business was "good." Sales were brisk, and—as is not always the case—the goods turned over at a profit. It looked as if Jonas's return might be signalized by a resumption of dividends.

And then, like a car with a faulty wheel, his mind jumped the track again, to mire itself in futile thoughts of Adrienne. That matter was all settled, he told himself, frowning. There was no shadow of logic in his continuing to think about her. But, as he had long suspected, man was not a logical creature.

With a mild oath, he thrust the papers away, and his head dropped forward, pillowed on his arms. All wounds yield to time, and in a few months Adrienne would be but a memory. He might, eventually, even forget her voice. But at the moment it rang in his ears as if she stood on the other side of the desk. His fists clenched. His casuistry was revealed in its emptiness. He wanted her, as he had never wanted anything before, and, he felt certain, as he would never want anything again.

She became, as he pondered, a kind of symbol of salvation. She constituted his only link with life. Without her, he must revert to nothing, a living creature, capable of speech and laughter—even tears—sensible of heat and cold and hunger, but without a soul. With her—he thought of the chrysalis emerging from the darkness of its cocoon, unfolding its damp and crumpled wings, and at the kiss of the sun blazing abruptly into color. Shriveled and inert was his spirit—a thing incomplete. But it was only sleeping. At a touch of her hand it might—it would—spread its wings and fly.

Grimly, he took the telephone at his elbow and called her number. "I want you to lunch with me," he said when she responded. "The green room at the Pontefract is quiet."

"But I have an engagement," she objected. "How about tomorrow?"

"Break it," he ordered. "I can't wait."

"But, Ammiel—"

"At twelve-thirty," he said, and hung up the receiver.

WHAT a contrast there was between himself and Baxter! The latter was the dynamic incarnate—a strong creature who idled gracefully, but with an object, offered pursuit of unrelenting vigor; a man who saw but one side of every question, and saw that completely. He had made up his mind that he wanted Adrienne—he had not troubled for an instant to wonder why he wanted her. The desire established, he had bent every resource of his able mind toward the consummation of his purpose. It was fantastic that he, Ammiel, cursed with a mind that saw both sides of everything with equal clarity, should even think of crossing swords with such a man as Baxter. It was quill against rapier, anchorite against man-at-arms.

But he was at the hotel a full half-hour before the time appointed. He waited impatiently, skimming a newspaper, smoking countless cigarettes, his heart showing unprecedented agitation.

She came at last, her tall figure floating through the crowd like a blossom on a summer breeze, her eyes inquiring—but not too inquiring—scanning the faces to right and left. He hurried forward to meet her.

"I have waited one million years!" he whispered as he took her hand.

Her laugh was easy. "I am quite on time. No woman should be that. It creates vain expectations."

He led the way to the table he had reserved—well removed from the orchestra. "Now," he began, when they were seated, "I—I understand that you—"

She held up her hand, smiling. "We haven't ordered yet. At a luncheon, that should take precedence, shouldn't it?"

"I'm not hungry," he growled.

"Imagination," she countered sweetly. "Anyway, I am. Let's see." She scanned the menu judiciously. "You ought to order, of course. But I can't trust you. I'm cafeteria-trained, you see. Oysters—mm! Seatags—yes."

He chuckled reminiscently. "Sorry I can't provide the green ones of France."

"Oh, those oysters! Wasn't it Irvin Cobb who said the only way one could distinguish between the good ones and the bad was that the bad ones tasted better?"

"And after the oysters?" Ammiel held his pencil poised.

"Oh, how you hurry me!" she protested. "Americans eat so practically. My French blood makes me enjoy the ordering more than the result. What are you going to have?"

"A ham sandwich and a glass of milk," said Ammiel gloomily.

"Proteins, carbohydrates and—heavens, what a realist! Well, I prefer a rose to be a rose. An omelet—and a salad which I shall have to mix myself, because you are lazy and incompetent and all things that a gentleman lunching with a lady should not be."

When he had written down the rest of the order and given it to the waiter, he nodded sorrowfully. "I'm not lazy. But I am incompetent. I—"

"I was only joking," she protested, "about the salad."

"Life is a salad. Competent gentlemen mix it to suit their taste. I—I take a ham sandwich—with or without mustard. It doesn't matter." He paused for a moment

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while another waiter set rolls and butter before them. Then, quietly, as if he were merely completing a sentence, he said: "I understand you're going to marry Jack Baxter."

His words startled her, but she did not show it. "Possibly. Why?"

"I wish I could think of some reason why you shouldn't," mused Ammiel, idly creasing his napkin. "But there isn't any."

"He has a past."

Ammiel nodded. "You've discounted that. All your shocks are behind you. You will probably be very happy."

"Probably. He has a great deal to offer a woman. He's rich—almost to the point of vulgarity. He has a very lively mind, well cultivated. He's not an idler—I'm told business people think well of him. And he has charm—he understands women. Oh, extraordinarily well, Ammiel!"

AMMIEL, as if he were checking off items in an auction catalogue, considered his outspread finger-tips. "Rich—clever—energetic—charming—and understands women. I—I am none of those things."

She regarded him with an enigmatic smile. "You—you have a certain charm, Ammiel," she said softly.

"I have nothing whatever to offer you," he said, his eyes on the tablecloth, "—nothing except a love which burns like a fire. I—I've tried to put it out. But the thoughts I throw on it—reasonable, practical thoughts—simply turn to gasoline. It—it puzzles me, Adrienne. It—"

"*Regarde mes huîtres*," she said abruptly. "It is an opportunity to provide myself with necessary iodine. Oysters are rich in iodine, Ammiel. And iodine—"

"Please," he begged, "do be serious."

"But I am serious! Iodine is good for the nerves. I—I am extremely nervous."

"Nervous? Why?"

She looked at him from behind the veil of her long lashes. "You are not lazy, Ammiel. And you are not unintelligent. And you are very charming. But you don't understand women, do you?"

"I haven't had much success with them," he admitted ruefully.

"Have you never been in love?"

"I am now!"

"Besides that?"

He shook his head. "Phyllis was the nearest thing. But you know what that was."

"How about Elsie Collins?"

A shadow of panic crossed his face, and he shrugged his shoulders. "I have nothing to say," he murmured.

His expression touched her, and she relented. "I'm sorry. I was just teasing you. You see—I know all about that. Clem told me. He seemed to think I ought to know."

Ammiel was momentarily dazed. "Then—why did you sell out to Slippak?"

"It was best," she answered evenly. "And Clem wanted to."

"You made him! He'd do anything you said."

"No. *Mauvaises affaires—mauvais amis.* We—we were all too close. It was best to end it."

He was silent for a moment. Then he sighed. "I suppose so. As Baxter's wife you couldn't very well be in business with me."

"Obviously not."

"Well—" He clipped off the word grimly. "When's it to be?"

"What?" Her eyebrows rose innocently. "My marriage to Mr. Baxter?"

"What else interests me?"

"But I haven't said I was going to marry him. I haven't even said I loved him—though, with a man so rich, that is incidental, of course."

He stared at her in amazement. "I—I don't understand. You're very strange, Adrienne!"

She laughed lightly. "Of course not. How could you understand me—when you don't understand women? Mr. Baxter—he could teach you something, Ammiel. He understands—how a woman like me could marry a man like him—with love an incident. You see, he is a man of the world. He knows how absurdly the importance of love has been magnified. He—"

Ammiel interrupted her. "Are you saying exactly what you mean, Adrienne?"

Deftly, she mixed her salad, tasted it, and made a wry mouth. "Such vinegar! I'm sure it isn't Taragon." Then, unconcernedly, she added: "You asked me a question? Oh, yes! Why, certainly I am! Was my remark so extraordinary?"

"It was not extraordinary. But it was not *you*."

SHE smiled blandly, her eyes meeting his without a flinch. "Your knowledge of life, Ammiel dear—" she began. Suddenly, like the setting of a tropic sun, her smile vanished, and her face was bleak and expressionless. She leaned across the table, and her voice lowered. "You don't know me, boy. I could marry Jack Baxter with no more love for him than that." She snapped her fingers. "What I have seen of life has given something to me—but it has also taken something away." A note of bitterness crept into her voice. "Women—those sheltered creatures who have seen the world only by reflection—can dream their dreams of the transfigurement of love. And they can shower their scorn on the wretched creature who trades a scented dream for comfort and security. I have been hungry, Ammiel. You have never been that. None of the women you know have ever been that. And when you have been hungry—well, you are never quite the same again."

He put his hand on hers. "I'll give you security, dear girl," he said wistfully. "I'm not dull—really. I've done pretty well with the business. I—"

"One atom of you is worth all the Baxters in the world," she said, her eyes aglow.

"I could never put you on a throne," Ammiel continued. "It'd be love in a cottage, all right. But I'd do my best. I can work harder than I have worked. With you as an object—"

She silenced him, her slender fingers upraised. "For a while, Ammiel dear, for a month—a year, perhaps, you might be content to lay your trophies at my feet. But I'm not an idol. I'm quite human—too human. The time would come when you would realize that. And then—"

"I have spent the years of my life—wondering," said Ammiel solemnly. "Wondering why life was—why *I* was. And now I have found the answer. I am like the half of a broken ring—and you are the other half. Separately we are useless—drifting—solitary—pathetic. Together—oh, Adrienne, I feel like that old Spaniard, standing on a peak in Darien—with a bright new world before me! I have traveled up hill and down dale, through a dreary world that hadn't a signpost to mark the way. And at last I have found the journey's end!"

"No! Beyond the sea that the Spaniard found, lay another land. It wouldn't be journey's end for you—it would be the beginning of an infinitely harder one."

"For your sake," he exclaimed, "I could do anything—stand anything!"

"Just so, dear lad. For my sake. For an ideal. And when that ideal wearied—proved false, perhaps—what would there be then?"

"But—"

She smiled very tenderly. "I might say, in truth, that I love you, Ammiel. But I shall not marry you. Beyond love—much matters."

"What does?"

She frowned, perplexed, as if seeking words that eluded her. "Love—that which lies beyond passion—is a melting of two souls. But the process is never quite complete. I shall be forever I—and you shall be forever you. How else can you explain the love that so often turns to hate? Like oil and water, the elements can separate."

"Of course they can," cried Ammiel. "But if you love me, and I love you—"

"Simple boy! Is that the whole tale? Ah, no! I may marry some one for what he is—dreams discounted, hopes in their grave, the fairies' colors bleached and dim. But I love you for what you might be—may be. And you—love me for what you think I am—what you think you are. Ammiel—" Her voice sank, and she looked at him earnestly. "If I were less wise, and agreed to go dancing through the moonbeams, hand in hand with you—what would that mean to you?"

"Mean to me?" he echoed doubtfully. "Why, that's a large question, isn't it?"

"Very. But I know the answer, if you do not. It would mean holding my hand, translating to each other the whisper of the birds—reading Shelley, I'm sure—" A note of mockery crept into her voice. "The honeymoon stretched and stretched—until it snapped with an absurd—oh, a devastating pop!

"No, Ammiel, dear, one cannot drink Château Yquem through the entire meal. One needs a solider wine—and dryer. A woman needs sweets all through her life, but she cannot live on them. True love is not cream puffs. There must be some—

beefsteak." She finished with a hard and mechanical laugh, but her great eyes were full of sadness.

Ammiel stared at his half-tasted food. "I guess I understand. A woman wants the love of her man. But she has to have pride in him, too."

She nodded eagerly. "Pride may be one of the deadly sins. But the lack of it is deadly, too—to love. Without it, there is only the love of a mother."

She paused, glancing at her watch.

"Goodness, I must fly!" Quite nonchalantly, she held the watch toward him. "Pretty thing, isn't it?"

He took her hand. "Very pretty. But—"

"Jack Baxter gave it to me," she said, drawing her hand away and rising. "Good-by, Ammiel. Thanks so much for the lunch. It was—delicious."

He sank back in his chair, staring at the tablecloth.

Success is bitter in the mouth of Ammiel, the imaginative business man, without Adrienne. See the conclusion of "The Phantom Caravan," in May EVERYBODY'S, out April 15.

Coming in May

Besides the complete novel, "The Recluse of Fifth Avenue," by Wyndham Martyn (see announcement on page 156), there will be—

Six Short Stories

A Life Policy — By Roland Pertwee

He had insured his wife against pretty nearly everything, but he overlooked one risk: the loss of her affection

Black and White Magic — By Edwina Levin MacDonald

Suspicion of a strange race creates a few domestic complications between an American girl and her foreign husband

The Heart of Macloughlin — By Albert Richard Wetjen

The coward who refused to be heroized, and the girl who knew her own heart

The Pink Dress — By Blanche Brace

Jealousy and hate give way to a finer understanding when rivals for a man's love face death together

Homer Hunterfield — By Stanley Olmsted

Drama in the lives of Southern mountaineers

Harrigan's Head — By Stephen Vincent Benét

The stark, compelling story of a woman's vengeance on the man she loved and hated

And two serials, "The Phantom Caravan," by Howard Vincent O'Brien, and "The Great Samara," by E. Phillips Oppenheim

May *EVERYBODY'S* — Out April 15

Conquerors *of the* City

Salesmanship Is the Highroad to Success, Jimmy's Boss Told Him, and Jimmy Believed It. But Suppose You Can't Sell Anything

By Charles Divine

SALESMEN! Jimmy Andrews met them everywhere. Hustling salesmen, sales-getters, live-wire salesmen, super-salesmen, salesmen who made big money, salemen who declared that every man was a live prospect, salesmen who were big repeaters, salesmen who were mopping up, salesmen who had selling ability, salesmen whose proposition was the berries. Even six months of sharing the metropolis with them had not changed Jimmy from the modest, rather easy-going young man that he was—until the day he decided to look for a new job.

Mr. Bixby, of Bixby & Co., was a brusque, bristling executive. His mustache had the stiff texture of a wire hairbrush. His eyebrows were little mustaches in themselves.

"What kind of a job are you looking for?" he snapped, after listening to Jimmy's introduction. "Office staff or sales force?"

"I'd rather be in the office, I guess," said Jimmy. "I don't think I could sell things very well."

Mr. Bixby's sharp glance rested on Jimmy's face. It was an agreeable face, with wide-set eyes and an obvious, generous nose. But Mr. Bixby frowned.

"I knew your father in college, Jimmy, and I liked him. But I'm sorry to hear his son say that he hasn't selling ability. It's the most essential quality. For example, you came in here to sell me your services today. But you haven't succeeded. You haven't convinced me that you've got something I want. In selling anything you must offer the other fellow something definite for his money. Instead of offering me anything this morning, you merely asked me to give you something. That's begging."

Jimmy's lanky figure suddenly stiffened.

"Everybody has to ask for a job sometime," he said.

"Yes, but the point is you ought to make me want to give you a job. Now, I'll tell you what to do. Go away and come back to see me tomorrow. When you get to my desk, don't lean against it. Stand up straight, on your own two feet. It's a sign of weakness to lean against anything when you're talking to a man. Don't use words like 'I guess' or 'maybe.' Be positive in your talk. That's another sales point. That's all today. I don't care at this moment to buy your services.

"And listen, Jimmy," Mr. Bixby concluded with an air of attaining an inspired climax never before presented to a caller. "A man has to sell himself to everybody he meets—his boss, his future wife—why, even a two-year-old boy is a salesman! He has to sell his personality to his mother and father!"

Jimmy gasped. "Yes, Mr. Bixby," he said, and backed out of the office, dazed.

Mentally, he staggered. In the restaurant into which he dropped, with his brain reeling with Mr. Bixby's words, he dined in an atmosphere in which all the cosmic elements—not to mention the women patrons—were changing their complexions. All the world was a territory, it seemed, and men and women merely salesmen. Salesmanship was the door to success, the key to the city, the universal urge. Eve sold Adam the apple, Columbus sold Isabella America, somebody probably sold Napoleon the retreat from Moscow.

Jimmy returned to his rooming-house and encountered Jane Hill in the hall again.

THIS night of May—call it May madness if you will—they looked deep into each other's eyes and made an exchange. He gave her a head-phone for a new detector tube. It was his first piece of salesmanship. Before separating to go to their rooms and their radios, they sat on the front steps and gazed out over the little square of grassless garden toward the gas-lamp at the curb.

"New York's the place for a young man with ambition!" declared Jimmy.

He looked across at Jane, sitting with her back against the porch pillar, and was glad that she hadn't bobbed her hair—not that he was opposed to bobbed hair, but he thought she was perfect as she was. He wouldn't have taken a hundredth of an inch from the delicious mesh of her copper-brown hair or from the white firmness of her chin. Like him, she had come to the city to conquer it. As in so many similar cases, the city didn't have the faintest inkling that it was being conquered. Yet Jimmy was now resolved to sell it defeat. In this conflict Jane was already desperately engaged, a slim, alert figure who dashed out to work every morning in such eagerness that she hated to waste time buckling the straps of her sandals. So she let them flap loosely about her shapely ankles until she reached the porch steps. Here she paused long enough to sit down and frantically buckle the straps. Then she hurried on in the direction of the workshop where she designed stage scenery all day long.

"Yes," she said, agreeing with Jimmy's comment on the city, "and New York is the place for an ambitious girl who wants a career."

"I'm glad I broke away from Miller's Forks," he continued. "I never could have got on there as I have here."

"And I'm glad I left Hooperville," returned Jane. "I'd still have been sitting on the front porch waiting for a beau."

"You may not have improved on the porch," said Jimmy, "but you certainly have on the beau!"

WHEN Jimmy got up in the morning he found that he was prepared for Mr. Bixby. Phrases of his selling talk had come to him during the night. There were possibilities for a selling campaign based on that alone: "Let your sub-conscious solve your problems while you sleep, and you will never know eye strain."

Jimmy went into Mr. Bixby's presence, putting his shoulders back and his arguments forward, until he came to the swift peroration:

"I'm intelligent and full of enthusiasm. I'm a hustler. Like attracts like. That's why I belong in a hustling concern—"

Mr. Bixby cut him short. "That's enough! You get the job. Go in and tell Mr. Appleton to give you a desk."

At that desk, in a corner where the business of Bixby & Co. swirled past in a steady procession of stenographers, clerks, and salesmen making reports, Jimmy found much food for thought. The food for his body was not so abundant, for Mr. Bixby said it was his policy, best for all concerned, to keep Jimmy on a small salary until he (Mr. Bixby) was fully satisfied with him.

June succeeded May in Jimmy's life and Jane's. This night of June—a June moon was as potent as May madness—they looked still deeper into each other's eyes and made a further exchange. He gave her a lightning arrester for a B-battery. Technically, what Jimmy received was known as UV 101-A, but, poetically, it was love.

"I get an awful kick out of being with you, Jane," he said.

They sat on the steps and talked. Jimmy talked of successful men and women; in his speech were echoes of Mr. Bixby's vast confidence.

"I'm not going to marry anybody just to get a home," replied Jane. "A woman who does that is a parasite. With me a career comes first. We've got to succeed."

"We *are* succeeding. Aren't you, Jane?"

"Rather! I got a new show to do today—scenery for the finales of two acts of a musical comedy."

"You—you won't be moving out of this house, will you?" asked Jimmy a little anxiously. "Going from here into a bigger apartment?"

"No. This is all right for me. Just a place to sleep. You see, I do all my work at the Blakesley Studios."

Somehow he felt slightly uneasy at her ready acceptance of the tenets he laid down for success. It was probably an old story to her.

Each day he greeted her lightly: "How's the career careening?"

And she would reply: "Fine! How's the ambition ambling along?"

He would answer: "If it was any better I'd have to ask the police to step in and stop it." Then he would enlarge upon the idea. And yet, each day, he felt more uneasy about it. The uneasiness grew into annoyance. Jane never had any depressing days, it seemed; all her projects were succeeding, whereas with Jimmy, well, despite the fact that he tried to sell himself a hopeful outlook upon life, he couldn't deceive his subconscious mind about the still small salary at which Mr. Bixby kept him pinned down, like an insect on a specimen sheet. On such a salary, marriage was impossible—except with an heiress. It was all right for Jane to talk about her successes, but there was no use rubbing it in, as if she were taunting him. It became downright uncomfortable. It made him want to keep away from her, and gradually that was what he began to do. To his surprise he noted that she encouraged this alienation. Before long he realized that they were as far apart as one of Browning's adjectives from its noun.

"Our jobs seem to keep us pretty busy," remarked Jane casually one evening as they passed in the hall.

"Yes. Mr. Bixby, the president, keeps me pretty close to him." That day the closeness had consisted of filling Mr. Bixby's inkwells. Jimmy hesitated at the foot of the stairs, awkwardly. "How about dinner together tonight?" She had always insisted upon going Dutch, a consummation devoutly to be wished for this evening.

"Sorry," she replied. "I've got a dinner date."

HE WAS relieved at first, and then he was annoyed, when he saw a young man arrive in a taxicab and carry her off in it. A taxi was a luxury Jimmy hadn't yet sold himself. If he ever took a taxi it would have to be some time when he was picked up in the street unconscious and transported to a hospital.

It was after midnight when they came back and sat on the front steps under Jimmy's open windows and talked and laughed softly—the very steps where he had sat with her. They disturbed no one except him, and his misery was created entirely within himself. Finally he could stand it no longer. He went to the window and called out:

"If my sleeping interferes with your conversation, I suppose I might give up sleeping."

Jane looked up. She had caught the sting in his voice.

"You don't have to stay up and listen to us!"

He slammed the window down and went back to bed. But the other window was still up, and the nocturnal sounds seemed to concentrate on that for entrance. Jimmy found his hands tensely clutching the sheets, his body suddenly rigid. What was that ominous silence below? And then that slippery little noise? Had he kissed her? Maybe not; maybe it was only his shoe sliding on the step. Anyway, the suspicion tortured Jimmy. He rolled over in bed and dug his head fiercely into the pillow, as if to smother his ears to all sounds outside. Yet the next moment he was listening, alert, again. Jane was lovely, but she was lost to him. Finally the young man decided to leave. "I've got to go to Philadelphia tomorrow to sell some advertising."

Jimmy gritted his teeth. Another salesman! A successful, dinner-coated salesman who sold Jane on the strength of a vocation that permitted him to sit on a step and indulge in small talk in the wee small hours. A super-salesman! Jimmy hoped that all his clients would be Bixbys.

The next morning Jane passed him in the hall without a word. She averted her head deliberately.

July succeeded June in Jimmy's life. It was the only thing that did succeed. On a Friday night Jimmy sat near his window with only a quarter in his pocket. He couldn't buy much of a dinner for a quarter, and if he spent it all for food he would have to walk to the office in the morning. And he was hungry, desperately hungry. At noon he had lunched on a pale glass of milk and a cruel cruller.

He studied this last surviving quarter dully and marked it idly with a red pencil which lay beside his radio set. Then he put on the head-phone and immediately heard Mr. Bixby addressing the Specialty Salesmen's Convention.

"It isn't money that counts," said Mr. Bixby; "it's character. Show me a man with character, and I'll show you a man to whom I want to be the first to award honor and success."

Jimmy groaned. "Liar!" he shouted, incensed by his impotence to make Mr. Bixby hear what he thought of his speech.

That was the trouble with the radio; you couldn't talk back to the speakers. Jimmy determined to sell his set and get what he could for it second hand. It was too late to do it tonight and relieve his almost penniless condition. So he leaned out of the window with the twenty-five-cent piece in his hand and breathed the summer air.

He looked down and started. That mesh of copper-brown hair in the window below could only be Jane's! Had she moved from the back of the house to the front? The suddenness of his discovery disconcerted him. His hand fell open—and his quarter fell out.

Bewildered, he followed its brief flight. It landed among the strands of Jane's thick hair, and stayed there enmeshed!

Jane vanished from the window slowly, as if unaware of the existence of the tenant above.

JIMMY stood in the middle of his room, excited. Would he have to go to bed hungry, just because his quarter had fallen into Jane's hair? Why the devil didn't she wear it bobbed! If he went down and asked her for the quarter, he reflected, he would have to confess his poverty. She would laugh at him, rather scornfully, no doubt; she was so darned successful now! And if he waited too long, the quarter might fall out of her hair onto the floor—and she would think it was hers.

He paced up and down the room. There was a terribly empty feeling in his stomach. He decided at length to swallow his pride and go downstairs and recover his money. He would rather be truthful than hungry.

He knocked on the door nervously and pushed it open when he heard Jane's voice calling "Come in!" She was standing near the window. Her eyes met his evenly.

With considerable confusion he explained his errand.

"Are you being funny?" she inquired coldly. "Why all this fuss about an insignificant twenty-five-cent piece? Why don't you make it a twenty-dollar bill?"

He flushed. "I'm making the fuss because it's true—and because it's my last quarter. If I don't get it back tonight, I don't eat." He added almost savagely: "Now do you understand! Please bend over and shake your head. I think the quarter will fall out."

She gazed at him wide-eyed and then bent over and shook her head. No coin fell to the floor. But something else did. It was Jane herself, suddenly pitching forward at Jimmy's feet. He bent over her, astonished, and saw that she had fainted.

He moved her limp body and lifted her head. As he did so, her right hand struck against the floor and opened. In the palm he saw something which gave him a further start: it was his quarter, with the red pencil markings—undeniably his quarter!

He ran down the hall for a towel, and soaked it in water, and, returning, soon brought Jane back to consciousness, after which he sat on the floor with his shoulder supporting her head.

"What did I do?" she asked weakly. "Faint?"

He nodded.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It was stupid of me, but when I bent over, everything went black. It's lack of food, I guess."

Amazed, he stared first at her white face and then at the quarter in her hand. She followed his gaze.

"Are you broke, too?" he demanded.

She nodded.

"But I thought you were on the crest of the wave!" he protested.

She shook her head sadly. "A wave of conversation—like yours. Oh, Jimmy! I gathered the impression that you were vice-president of the company—or soon about to be. That's why I avoided you. I got sick of hearing of success—somebody else's, and not mine!"

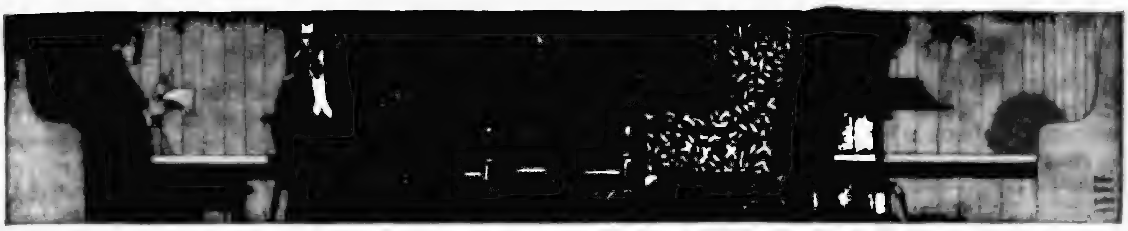
"My selling talk!" Jimmy groaned. The truth of the situation burst upon him. "Good heavens! We oversold ourselves!"

In Jane's room they had a festive dinner of twenty-five cents' worth of delicatessen food and tea made over a fire of canned heat—all in celebration, as Jimmy said, of a Return to Reason.

"I'm a flat failure at painting scenery," confessed Jane.

"Hooray!" exulted Jimmy. "And I'll never be a success with Bixby & Co.!"

On this basis they embraced each other.



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

THE feat of keeping three nom de plumes before a reading public seems to us something of an arduous task—much like that of the juggler with too many tennis balls. But the author of "His Birthday" (page 19) has done it with rare skill. Her Chimney Corner chat, told in the third person, should prove enlightening.

Maryse Rutledge, the novelist and writer of short stories, who in real life is Mrs. Gardner Hale of Paris, is a little apt to confuse those fairly well *au courant* of contemporary activities in American letters. Volumes bearing the signatures of Marie Louise Goetchius, Marie Louise Van Saanen and of the present literary incarnation of Mrs. Hale—Maryse Rutledge—have each and all their admirers, but the common identity of the authors is generally ignored.

Mrs. Hale, née Marie Louise Gibson, was born in Tuxedo and passed her childhood there. From that circumstance she might have been expected to devote herself to society rather than to art, but her vocation declared itself early. Her first poem was published in the New York *World* when she was only seven; in her early teens she was co-editor of a literary magazine published by the pupils of Miss Spence's school.

Moreover, she had the good fortune to enjoy, at this very early stage, the friendship and counsel of one of the most urbane of American men of letters, poet, at once critic and editor, the late Richard Watson Gilder. It was due to his encouragement that she began contributing short stories to the popular magazines, and several years later brought out her first novel, "Anne of Treboul," which had immediate success. It was signed "Mary Louise Goetchius," but the two which immediately followed, "Wild Grapes" and "The Blind Who See," were published as the work of Marie Louise Van Saanen.

"Children of Fate," which received the signature that Mrs. Hale declares is to become permanent, added to the mystery, for the publisher inadvertently printed upon the cover not "Maryse Rutledge" but "Marie Rutledge." Mrs. Hale hopes, however, to see this question of signature finally settled by a volume of short stories published early last autumn under the title "The Sad Adventures." In this new series of cosmopolitan life Mrs. Hale has tried to do for the present generation something resembling what Henry James did for his. The Americans visiting Europe since the war and establishing more or less close relations with Europeans, are, as she points out, not only more numerous but more broadly representative than those to be met in London, Paris or Florence between 1870 and 1914.

As to the manner of writing this social history in fiction form, Mrs. Hale holds fast to tradition. She is an unwavering advocate of careful and polished prose, of persistence in the search for the *mot juste*, of respect for syntax, and of frank dependence upon the great monuments of English literature as models in her work.

"IT'S an ill wind . . ." That the old proverb is still reliable is proved conclusively by the literary career of George Looms ("The Caraways," page 79) which began, he tells us, when an extended trip to Denver became imperative.

I was graduated from Princeton University [he writes] in the age of assent—before the war. I had several years in business of all sorts and conditions; have known bankruptcy as well as normalcy. In the war I fought on this side of the Atlantic; was a captain of infantry, but all that my infantry seemed to accomplish was intensive training. When the war was over I applied for discharge, but was denied it. They sent me to hospital for sixteen months for a bad lung. That brought me to Denver and gave me intensive leisure.

Instead of making baskets and bead necklaces, I went to work writing blurbs for the Post papers! I went on a little further and sent some of my stuff to a book-publishing house. Then I got a job on one of the Scripps-Howard papers and was dramatic critic in Denver for two years. This fall I switched to a Schaffer paper and am writing special stuff and semi-editorial stuff and full editorial stuff and music criticism. I knew nothing of dramatic criticism when I started and there are those who claim without animus that I know nothing about it now. I know even less about music and still less about politics. As for philosophy, I have very little, being disposed to try to understand the motives of men and women, rather than to reform them. The sixteen months of specialized leisure have given me an unconventional chance.

I have a wife and daughter, the latter aged two. These two and my home and my present job and my "alleged career" I have acquired since the war. My next ambition is to "acquire" a trip to observe how people do things in different environments, but chiefly to enjoy it.

FOR those who treasure anecdotes of great men, Sonya Levien "Gunwoman," page 64) has much of interest in her Chimney Corner talk. From 1914 until the time of his death, it was her great privilege to know Theodore Roosevelt as a fellow worker, since she was engaged on the editorial staff of a magazine to which the Colonel was a regular contributor. Of his lively interest in matters both important and trivial, of his friendliness, his democratic spirit, and his inquisitiveness she says:

His knowledge of many subjects was largely due to an insatiable and almost naïve curiosity about everything and every one that came within his ken. I have seen him absorbed in conversation with the late Robert Bacon, Gen. Joffre and Peter Finley Dunne, and an hour later stop the office boy, and with equal interest find out how he was getting along with his course, at night school—the young man was trying to become a wireless operator and was hunting for a place on a battleship. Colonel Roosevelt had his heart set on helping him and felt that it was important to give his time to it.

He had a penchant for nicknames and called me "Little Miss Anarchist" for no other reason that I could discover except that he knew I was born in Russia and had been reared in a nihilistic group. How he found all that out at the time I never knew. Later, in the course of conversation, he discovered that I had several friends on the Ford peace ship and changed the name to "Little Pacifist." When our country was plunged into the World War he instinctively dropped the nickname.

ONE day he was sitting in my office going over some cuts that I had made in his copy. I accused him of always writing about twice as much as we were told to expect. "A common offense in my life, young lady. But I find it necessary to be explicit or else be misinterpreted," he retaliated with that characteristic snap of the jaw when voicing a conviction. He read a sheet and flung it into the wastebasket. "But from a literary viewpoint I find that my copy can always be improved by cutting," he twinkled boyishly.

I once praised him for his punctuality and he said, "I have it on my mind and the only way to free my mind for other things is to do it. So I go right at it."

Then he said that since the "Little Pacifist" would no longer do, he was going to call me "Sonya." Suddenly his meticulous enunciation burst loud upon the silence of the office and penetrated the partition that separated my room from that of my husband, who was managing editor of the magazine. "I love the name of Sonya, and I'm going to call your wife S-O-N-Y-A."

Permission was granted. He wanted to know how I came by the foreign name of Sonya. I told him something about my early youth in Russia, and about my father who in his youth was a follower of Prince Kropotkin, the famous royal anarchist, and how my father was eventually exiled to Siberia, and how years later, through the aid of a German engineer by the name of Levien, he escaped and came to America. My father left Russia as the son of this German and since then our family has kept the adopted name.

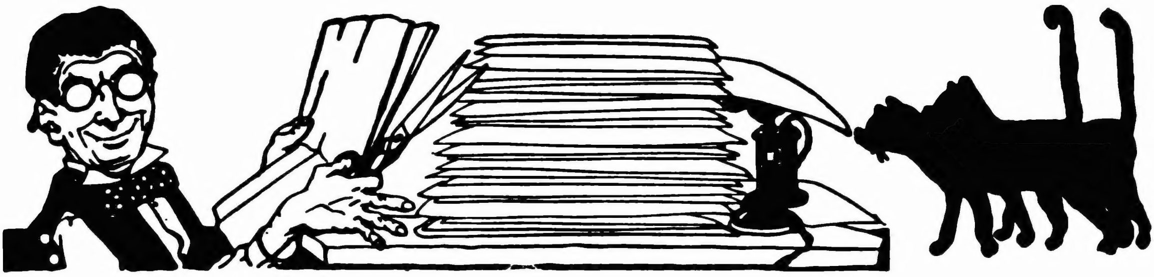
THE Colonel followed with anecdotes and encounters, some pugilistic, with the various types of Russian immigrants during the years he was Police Commissioner of New York. He mentioned a well-known banker and finished with a startling generalization.

He said, "I prefer the gunman type of immigrant to the banker type." This he amplified at length. He deplored the "sinister, insidious influence of Big Business" in matters of politics, whereas street gangsters, he asserted, fought for their interests in the open. "Most of the East Side boys who came before me had many of the characteristics of early pioneers. They were boys with imagination and initiative, with bursting ambition to make their own way. They had an indomitable instinct for independence and the vitality to get it for themselves. I found that when their energies were directed along lawful channels, they developed into hustling, progressive, bully citizens. We need fighters of the right sort."

"Are your parents Kosher?" was his next question. I told him they were. Immediately he became interested and wanted me to tell him about them, giving him an inkling of their feelings and of their psychology about America, for he was genuinely curious about people who were forced to bridge and mix different civilizations.

I always felt that his remarkable capacity for retaining information was due to a unique memory. He was never at a loss to quote at length from the thousands of books he had read. But best of all he knew the Bible. I pride myself on knowing the Old Testament; I had a scholarly grandfather in Russia who taught it to me for many years in the original Hebrew. But the Colonel easily outquoted me. We had many interesting discussions on religion and I remember him saying very emphatically: "It does not matter what religion a man follows, but it does matter greatly that he should have some religion to follow. A human being should believe and have faith in something!"

Well, the Colonel came very near being a Religion and a Faith to those privileged to know him as a friend.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

Lawyer in Westminster Bldg., Chicago: "*PAYSOFF TINKOFF.*"
Head of Associated Charities, Kenosha: "*Mrs. Neidy.*"
Laundry on So. Crawford Avenue, Chicago: "*Lark Sing Lo.*"
In Stillwater, Okla.: "*I. Wm. Swims, 523 Duck Street.*"
In Hartford, Conn.: "*A. Toboco, Tailor.*" (Wrappers all rite, but of another kind.)
Engineer in charge of state highway construction at Metropolis, Ill.: "*George A. Rhoads. Popularly known as 'Dusty.'*" (P. C. H.)
Hardware firm in Peterson, Iowa: "*Sits and Hints.*" (MISS B. S. E.)
In Murdo, S. D.: "*Beatem and Burnham.*" (MISS B. S. E.)

(Ad in Illinois State Register)

SPECIAL VALUES SATEEN BLOOMERS

With sitting room in every pair.

Yes, but have you got any with also a *porch?*

(Headline in Chicago Journal)

TRAINS HOGS TO OPEN DOORS.

Reverse your course, man, reverse your course; makum *shutum!*

(In Chicago)

Miss Belle Bender, Bender Ballet School.

She ought to get Miss Ruth Wiggle, of the Clinton Community School, and Miss Wava Proudfoot, of Osceola, Iowa, on her staff.

(Barry Adage, Barry, Ill.)

We make no charge for obituaries of moderate length, provided no poetry is attached. Obituary poetry, regular local rate.

It's worth ten times any old rate just to proofread the darned stuff.

(Headline in Chicago Examiner)

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE IN HAND.

Hevings! Where *next?*

(Sign in Chicago)

WE ALSO CUT MEN'S HAIR.

Next we may expect cigar stores to hang out the sign: "Men's Trade Invited."

(Falmouth, Ky., Outlook)

Mr. and Mrs. L. H. Daugherty entertained Sunday Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Kenner and children, Ruby, Opal and Goldie.

Guess Pearl, Pansy and Pinkie were left over at gran'ma's for the day.

(Sunshine Park, Lexington, Ky.)

Mrs. Omar Asbury received a letter from her sister, Miss Viola Wilson, in Cincinnati, and she said her and a friend motored to Falmouth last Sunday to see her father, but she didn't get to see him. She said she supposed he was out calling on his best girl, as usual.

The old man must be "stepping out" a bit.

(Grant's Lick, Ky.)

The masked social given by the D. of A. at this place Thursday night was an event that was much enjoyed and caused much merriment and laughter. The hall was artistically decorated, with ribbons, forest leaves, pumpkins, witches and cats. Those garbed in grotesque costumes gave much perplexity to the onlookers as to who was who, Miss Bessie Vater, as one of the Gold Dust Twins, wearing the most conspicuous costume.

Boy, that ain't the word a-tall.

(Galveston Daily News)

ANYONE who can lead up to recovery of bathtub taken by mistake from 2811 Q. Liberal reward; no questions asked. Chas. H. Elbert, 2118 O. Phone 4390.

Well, I'm going to hold on to it until after Saturday night, anyway.

Copyright, 1925, by Gridley Adams

(*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*)

Henry Ford has bought the old Concord coach.

That's another rattling good vehicle.

(*Falmouth, Ky.*)

Mrs. Helen Fury and son were guests of Mrs. Mattie Ruff, at Milford over Sunday.

A quiet time was had by all.

(*Falmouth, Ky.*)

RIVER BACKS UP BEHIND BIG DAM.

Well, for what purpose *did* they build the dam thing?

(*Joplin, Mo., News-Herald*)

Mr. and Mrs. E. B. Willix of Mount Vernon, are visitors here today. Mr. Willix has the distinction of being one of two men in the United States and probably in the world.

I take it that Mrs. W. was married before.

(*Carthage, Ky.*)

Miss Edith Dawn was the dinner gust of Miss Velle Diesel, and spent the night.

Just *blew in* for a good meal.

(*Grant's Lick, Ky.*)

The oyster supper at the hall Saturday night was well attended, and patronized, and the soup was superfine. The ladies who made it deserve much credit. The most interesting feature of the evening was the bursting of the inner tube. The strokes it took to burst it being 324, and was won by Willie Drake.

And Willie probably got THE oyster as a prize.

(*Morganstown, Ky.*)

Mrs. Lula Sandman, Mr. and Mrs. Roy Sandman and son, and Misses Ida and Sue Sandman were recent callers of Mrs. Wilson.

Poor woman, she was half asleep before they all had got fairly seated.

(*Kelat, Ky.*)

The cream station at this place is no more—the drought cut it short.

It sure needs old man Pluvius to run a milk route *profitably*.

(*Jersey Journal*)

Whenever you feel a coal fastening itself upon you, practice deep breathing and get as much fresh air into your lungs as possible. (MISS H. P. W.)

Sure, 'cause when you get the coal bill you'll need all the strength you can muster.

(*Rhinebeck, N. Y., Gazette*)

A daughter was born to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Proper Monday Morning.

Very, indeed.

(*Phila. Bulletin*)

YOUNG LADIES, over 21, for soda and lunch; no Sundays. Evans, 1106 Chestnut. (J. T., JR.)

And I just adore sundaes.

(*Vallejo Evening Chronicle*)

Miss Ethel Florence Belsey, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Belsey, 221 Fremont Street, became the bridge of Earl Lawrence Shore of Berkeley at eight o'clock Saturday night. (C. A. R.)

And Earl became the bridge's main support.

(*Eighth Avenue, New York*)

Singers Baby Bazar.
Selling Out.
Don't Miss This Chance To Stock Up.

Thank you, but the last pair of twins took all my loose change.

(*New York Herald*)

Nothing so bores the people of New York as old stuff. They were delighted with Mr. Hylan's description of the thousand cows that fed upon the thousand hills of Mr. Hearst's ranch.

Where every little hillock has a bullock all its own.

(*Ad in House Beautiful*)

More Perfect Peonies—By Gumm.

I'll say they were, by Golly!

(*Hoquiam, Wash., Washingtonian*)

Mrs. Fred Smith was given a shower at her home Wednesday. (MISS W. E. C.)

Her friends just insisted upon it.

(*Napa, Calif., Register*)

A 37-Pound Fish Landed By H. Rasler. (R. S.)

Well, would they have us believe that they flop over into the boat of their own accord?

(*Morgansville, Ky.*)

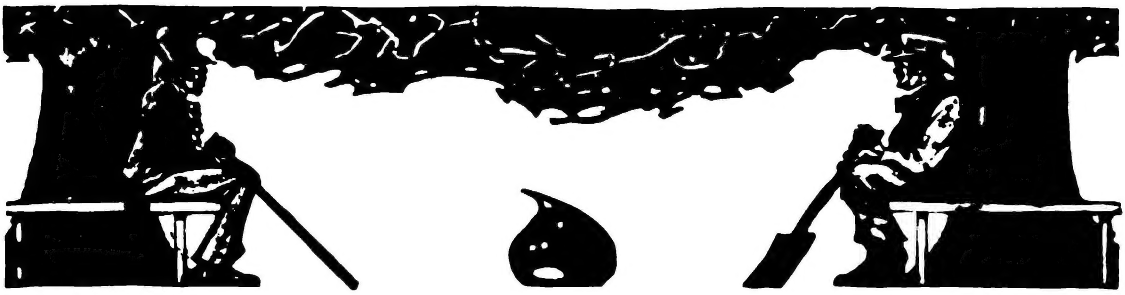
Mrs. Berry Brown called Wednesday morning.

That's too bad; I didn't hear a sound.

(*Sign in Los Angeles store*)

WANTED—Lady Presser and Spotter. (R. C.)

What! Hard to spot that kind *out there?*



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

EDITOR'S NOTE: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

THE customer having coughed loudly to signify his impatience, at last attracted the shop-keeper's attention.

"I want a mouse-trap," he said rather sharply. "A good one, and please be quick for I want to catch a train."

The shop-keeper eyed him coldly.

"I regret, sir," he said, "that my mouse-traps are not guaranteed to catch trains."

"FADDER," said Ikie, "give me a penny."

"Vot you want mit a penny?" asked his father.

"To buy an all-day sucker."

"Vat, an all-day sucker and it's three o'clock in the afternoon already?"

A WELL-KNOWN golfer tells the story of two players who sliced their drives into the rough and went to look for the balls. They searched a long time without success. An old lady watched them with sympathetic eyes. Finally she couldn't stand it any longer, so she beckoned to them and said:

"I hope I'm not interrupting, gentlemen, but would it be cheating if I were to tell you where they are?"

A CERTAIN lady called her grocer up on the telephone the other morning. After she had sufficiently scolded the man who responded, she said:

"And what's more, the next order you get from me will be the last I'll ever give you."

"It probably will, madam," said the voice at the other end of the wire. "You're talking to the undertaker."

JAKEY'S doctor informed him he would have to consult a specialist. So he went to a specialist. In the waiting room he found a number of patients and an attendant told him to take a seat and wait for his turn. Jakey fidgeted around for a while and finally nudged the arm of a patient who sat next to him and said:

"Is he a good doctor?"

"Best there is in his line," was the reply.

"Does he charge high prices?" asked Jakey.

"Very," said the stranger. "Fifty dollars for the first visit and twenty-five for every visit after that."

Jakey sank back in his chair. After a while a pleasant smile stole over his face. When his turn came and he was shown into the doctor's private office, he rushed forward, grasped the doctor by the hand, shook it vigorously and exclaimed:

"Well, doctor, here I am again."

A MAN who conducted an unprofitable business took out a fire insurance policy. The same day a blaze broke out that completely destroyed the building and all the contents.

The insurance company fought desperately to find sufficient grounds to refuse the payment of the policy, but in vain, and was obliged to content itself with the following letter appended to the check:

"Dear Sir: We note that your policy was issued at ten o'clock Thursday morning, and that the fire did not break out till three-thirty. Will you kindly explain the delay?"

"WILL ye be lookin' here?" demanded an Irishman of the waiter. "This lobster do be afther havin' only one claw."

"Aha!" ejaculated the waiter, expert through long practice in this sort of thing. "You see, lobsters often fight with each other and occasionally one loses a claw."

"Aha, yerself!" replied Pat, pushing back his plate. "That bein' the case, bring me the winner."

AS A steamer was leaving the harbor of Athens a well-dressed young passenger approached the captain, and pointing to the distant hills, inquired:

"What is that white stuff on those hills, captain?"

"That is snow, madam," replied the captain.

"Well," remarked the lady, "I thought so myself, but a gentleman just told me it was Greece."

A YOUNG woman who came to Columbia to take her degree of Doctor of Philosophy married her professor in the middle of her second year. When she announced her engagement, one of her friends said:

"But, Edith, I thought you came up here to get your Ph.D.?"

"So I did," replied Edith, "but I had no idea I would get him so soon."

NEWS had reached the village of Forksville that a motor-bus plying between the two neighboring towns of Bumpton and Gush Hollow had gone over the side of a cliff with all on board. It was also known in Forksville that the wife of a much henpecked Bud Blodgett was en route to Gush Hollow via the bus line. An interested villager immediately called on Bud.

"Ain't ye worried 'bout yer wife, Bud?" he asked.

"Well," replied Bud, "I was fer a while, but her cousin in Bumpton jest called up and said she saw Sal git on the bus with her own eyes."

"I'M BOTHERED fierce with rats," said Mrs. Casey, owner of the boarding-house.

"Did ye buy any of thim rat biscuit for them?" suggested Mrs. Kelly.

"Now, Mrs. Kelly, what kind of a house do you think I'm runnin'? Sure, if the beasts can't ate what we do, they kin go hungry."

A REVIVAL was raging in a Virginia colored church. The fruits had been considerable. One obdurate soul, however, resisted the efforts of the elder. Called to account for his reluctance, he replied:

"Yo' see how it is, Elder. I'se got a problem. I don't see how I'se gwine git mah shirt on ovah mah wings when I gits to Glory."

"Dat ain't yo' problem," retorted the exhorter promptly. "Yo' problem is how is yo' gwine git yo' hat on ovah yo' horns."

A KIND-HEARTED gentleman, hearing a dog howling mournfully, decided to investigate the animal's ailment. He found the dog sitting calmly upon his haunches but still emitting agonized yelps.

"What ails your dog?" he asked the hound's owner.

"Oh, he's just lazy," returned the owner unconcernedly.

"But laziness won't make a dog howl."

"Yes, but that dog is sitting on a sandburr."

THE head of a coal firm, irritated beyond endurance at a driver's blunders, discharged him and told him never to come back to the firm for a recommendation.

"You are so confounded thick-headed you can't learn anything," said the manager.

"Begorra," said the Irishman, "I've learned one thing since I've been wid ye."

"What is that?" asked the manager.

"I've learned," answered the Irishman, "that sivinteen hundred make a ton."

PAT and Jerry were bosom friends. One day Pat fell from the top of a telephone pole, but caught a wire and hung suspended. Jerry rushed for a ladder that happened to be conveniently near, at the same time yelling. "Hould on, Pat! Oi'll get yez down in a minit!" . . .

"Och, me lad! Why didn't ye hould on?" almost sobbed Jerry as he bent over Pat at the hospital.

"Sure, Oi was afraid the wire'd break," said Pat.

STAGE MANAGER: Go forward, man; can't you hear them crying "Author! author!"

TIMID PLAYWRIGHT: I—just so. B-but what are their—ah—intentions?